PLAYING THE GAMES: DIASPORIC IDENTITY, ATHLETIC ENTREPRENEURIALISM, AND ELODIE LI YUK LO'S JOURNEY TO THE OLYMPICS

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Abstract

This dissertation is a life writing project that examines the international career of Elodie Nioun Chin Li Yuk Lo—a Chinese Mauritian Canadian immigrant who represented a small African nation, Mauritius, at the 2012 Olympics in beach volleyball. Elodie's journey to the Games serves as a window into how diasporic athletes negotiate their identities in international competitions organized around singular conceptions of citizenship and nation. Elodie's personal reflections on her family's complex migratory experience and her own athletic career lie at the heart of this project—a co-constructed story that blurs the boundaries of life writing genres and individual authorship.

It opens with Elodie's ancestral ties to Mauritius, positioning Africa and the Chinese diaspora at the center of a historical trajectory spanning slavery to indenture, colony to nation-state, and colonial subjects to independent citizens, in which cultural change was intimately related to political and familial transformation. The family's identification as migrants—from China to Mauritius in the nineteenth century, and from Mauritius to Canada in the late-twentieth—illustrates how cultural identity evolves through an ongoing diasporic experience.

In Canada, where Elodie found herself both insider and outsider in a predominantly Cantonese-speaking immigrant community, volleyball represented a complex nexus of opportunity and Othering. Elodie's success as an indoor volleyball player in Canada demonstrate how her investment in sport both entangled and served her as a racial minority and recent immigrant. After university, Elodie switched to beach volleyball and entered international competition through diversity policies intended to stimulate global participation. But as a diversity entrant to the Games, the industry reduced Elodie to an actor in an international spectacle of nations that embodied an unequal globalized world through corporate consumption.

Indeed, the ideals of sport promoted by the Olympics were rife with paradox: a harmonious global community rooted in competitive nationalisms, cohesive national identities based on fictions of multicultural harmony, and a "meritocracy" in the interest of global marketing. This dissertation thus provides an intimate, diasporic, multiethnic perspective on international sport—a perspective that highlights the issues inherent in the nation-based structure of the Olympics that conflates ethnicity, nation, and culture.

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List of Abbreviations

AAG	All-Africa Games
CAVB	Confederation Africaine de Volleyball
CBVC	Continental Beach Volleyball Cup
CCC	Chinese Chamber of Commerce
FIVB	Fédération Internationale de Volleyball
GTA	Greater Toronto Area
IOC	International Olympic Committee
MLP	Mauritian Labor Party
MOC	Mauritian Olympic Committee
NACIVT	North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
OUA	Ontario University Athletics
OVA	Ontario Volleyball Association
PMSD	*Parti Mauricien Sociale Démocrate*
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

Introduction

> [I]n Mauritius…I'm an outsider, because I've been out of the country longer than I've been in the country…I don't feel like I'm really Canadian either, even though I grew up here. So it's funny, in Mauritius I'm Canadian, in Canada I'm Mauritian…And when I was in France I was Mauritian-Canadian, but they were like, 'but you're Chinese.' And I'm like, 'okay, so, I'm Chinese-Canadian-Mauritian.' [Laughing.][1]
>
> —Elodie Li Yuk Lo

How did an ethnically Chinese woman from Canada come to represent an African nation at the Olympics? This dissertation follows the multinational, multicultural, migratory life and athletic career of Elodie Nioun Chin Li Yuk Lo: one of the first two women from Mauritius to compete in beach volleyball at the Olympics.[2] Elodie's self-fashioning within local, national, and transnational arenas reveals the contradictory operations of "multiculturalism" and nationalism that are often unanalyzed and naturalized. Elodie's journey to and participation in the Olympics reveal practices within the global sport complex that obfuscate geopolitical inequalities while re-inscribing dominant racial and cultural narratives. Her story offers a window into the ways that organizations such as the *Fédération Internationale de Volleyball* (FIVB) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have harnessed ideologies of meritocracy, multicultural democracy and anti-racist camaraderie within sport to fictions of international harmony and the promotion of a globalized athletic entrepreneurship. Although Elodie's story is unique, her multiple subjectivities and experiences as a diasporic athlete—embodying parts of the West, Africa, and Asia—elucidate the way racially marked subjects negotiate legitimacy or national belonging within competing and overlapping multicultural and international sporting contexts.

Born September 29, 1982 in Port Louis, Mauritius, Elodie is fifth and third generation Mauritian on her paternal and maternal sides, respectively. On April 19, 1989 Elodie immigrated

[1] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with Yuka Polovina, April 10, 2013.
[2] London 2012 Games.

to Canada at the age of six with her parents Eddy and Hélène Li Yuk Lo and younger sister Kimmy Li Yuk Lo. All became Canadian citizens four years later. Elodie grew up in downtown Toronto's Chinatown, one of the city's largest immigrant communities. Her parents brought the family to Canada for better social and economic opportunities, in addition to better educational prospects for their children.

The country they left behind, Mauritius—commonly known to Western Europeans as a honeymoon destination—is uniquely multiethnic, multilinguistic, and multireligious.[3] Elodie's own paternal great- great- grandparents migrated from China to Mauritius in the late 1800s. They joined a flood of Chinese laborers who emigrated to post-slavery outposts along with indentured migrants from India between the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Some of these Chinese migrants were indentured laborers while others were free migrants seeking opportunity.[4] Today, Indo-Mauritians (comprising sixty-eight percent of the population) occupy the great majority of positions of power such as the government. Although Chinese-Mauritians are a minority group (three percent of the population),[5] they tend to have above average economic and educational status and emigrate at a disproportionately higher rate than other groups.[6] Many of Elodie's Chinese-Mauritian relatives and friends have spread across the globe to Canada, the U.S., the U.K., Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Singapore, South Africa, and Hawai'i.

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[3] *The World Factbook,* s.v. "Mauritius," last modified September 24, 2015, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mp.html.

[4] Hakka Chinese migrants represented a large proportion of this laboring group, and this regional dialect continues to serve as a group identifier within Chinese diasporic communities, globally. Elodie is among this subethnic group.

[5] Mauritius' ethnic breakdown is the following: Indo-Mauritian 68%, Creole (black) 27%, Sino-Mauritian 3%, Franco-Mauritian 2%. *World Factbook,* s.v. "Mauritius."

[6] Mauritius became an independent country in 1968 and is also a member of the Francophonie and Commonwealth of Nations. Since independence, Mauritius has become a middle-income diversified economy from a low-income agricultural economy making the country relatively more privileged than many of its continental African counterparts.

Elodie's family history of migration and her own dual citizenship profoundly shaped her unusual and impressive career trajectory. In Canada, Elodie played for an indoor club league in the predominantly white Ontario Volleyball Association (OVA) throughout high school, then attended the University of Toronto, Faculty of Physical Education where she earned a spot as starting *libero* (defensive specialist) on the women's intercollegiate volleyball team. She won all-Canadian rookie of the year in 2001 and served as team co-captain in her the last two years at the University. From 2008 to 2010 and 2012-2014 she was the assistant coach for University of Toronto's women's volleyball team, and the Junior National Beach Volleyball coach in 2013. Elodie's international volleyball career started in 2007 when she played for Mauritius's national volleyball team for one brief season and moved on to beach volleyball in 2008. She competed with her beach volleyball partner, Natacha Rigobert from 2008 to 2012. Together they won the All-Africa Games in 2011 and the Mauritian Athletic Team of the Year award in 2012 (based on athletic excellence). In 2012, they represented Mauritius in the Olympic Games in London, England.

By the 2012 London Games, it was not uncommon for athletes to claim ties to more than one country, although the Olympic regulations allowed them to officially represent only one. Sport commentators often celebrated the Games and their global participants as the progress of globalization and international cooperation. At the 2014 Sochi Olympics, 120 of the three thousand athletes competed for countries other than their birth nations.[7] Elodie was among this increasingly transnational athletic community. Her ties to three major regions of the world—

[7] Pew Research Center, *How Many Sochi Athletes Are Competing for a Country That Is Not Their Birth Nation?*, February 19, 2014, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/19/how-many-sochi-athletes-are-competing-for-a-country-that-is-not-their-birth-nation/. There is also scrutiny. Team Great Britain had 60 foreign born athletes who were called "plastic Brits" by the *Telegraph.* See Andrew Blenkinsop and David Kinross, "Team GB: 'Plastic Brits' – Where Do They Come From?," *Telegraph* (UK), July 11, 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/olympic_infographics_and_data/9391327/Team-GB-Plastic-Brits-where-do-they-come-from.html.

Asia, North America, and Africa—both fascinated and confused competitors and audiences. At times, it excited their hostility. Elodie's testimony of her ascent into the world of international competition complicates the inventions of multicultural harmony and the rhetoric of meritocracy that predominate in Olympic circles. Her rise to the Olympics provides a first-person window on the role of sport in the global production of nation, race, and identity.

As the largest international sporting event of the year, the 2012 Games gathered athletes from 204 countries to compete against one another and to perform nationalism on a global stage. Over the decades, national governments have used the Olympics to push political agendas, activists have staged protests, and even terrorists have committed deadly crimes at the Games. Even the founding of the modern Olympics was inherently political. Pierre de Coubertin and succeeding International Olympic Committee presidents envisioned the modern Olympics as a competitive means to a cooperative end among warring nations.[8] From its inception, the Olympics was an avenue for nations to exercise political soft power and to shape ideology through symbolic acts before, after, and throughout the competition. The history of the modern Games encapsulates a global archive of modernity, decolonization, capitalism, technological progress, and more. The Olympics have witnessed and participated in major global shifts of power, and thus serve as a microcosm of global politics.

Scholarship on the Games tends to focus on macro-level critique or on high-profile athletes. My project, by contrast, adopts as its focus not an Olympic star but a lesser-known participant. Elodie and her partner did not win a single beach volleyball match and were knocked out of the tournament in the first round. While my dissertation engages questions of global power and politics, it employs a micro rather than a macro lens as it follows one transnational athlete

[8] Allan Guttmann, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 1.

who travelled for access to competitions and training as she represented her diasporic cultures officially for Mauritius and unofficially for Canada. Elodie's history within international sport reveals the Olympics as emblematic of a larger globalized system that produces and fosters privileged transnational subjects. Her personal story highlights the paradox of cohesive national identities based in multicultural rhetoric, a global community based on competitive nationalisms, and Olympians as models of meritocracy who serve the interests of global capital.

Playing the Games at its core is a life writing project that examines the processes of diasporic identity formation in the context of international athletic competition. The title intentionally carries multiple meanings. First, it represents Elodie's actual participation in sports from early childhood through the Olympics. "Playing" also signifies the strategies that Elodie employed to navigate the rules for Olympic qualification. Finally, interpreted broadly, the title gestures to the way immigrants navigate marginalization in complex negotiation with dominant cultures. *Playing the Games* thus means to participate, whether consciously or unconsciously, as actors in shaping their own positionalities and experiences. For Elodie, as I demonstrate in the following pages, *Playing the Games* is more a process than a discrete event.

Disciplinary Borderlands

This dissertation crosses disciplinary boundaries and falls within no single genre. Although it focuses on the life of Elodie, it rejects the claims to objectivity, truth, and authorial distance of traditional biographies. While it focuses on diasporic cultures in Mauritius and Canada as well as the culture of sport, it is not an ethnography of a single group. My own experience inflects everything written here, but the dissertation foregrounds Elodie's testimony rather than my own; in that sense, it is not an autoethnography. I recorded the testimony of Elodie's experience, but she did not intend her words as protest or political intervention; thus, it

is distinct from the Latin American tradition of *testimonio*. Drawing from each genre but contained by none, this dissertation is at root an innovative form of life writing grounded in the evolution of relationships: mine with Elodie, and Elodie's with her family, the worlds of sport, and her diasporic communities. While Elodie experiences herself as inside and outside multiple nations and cultures, I, too, am both insider and outsider in this dissertation: not simply a silent witness, but inseparably part of our writing relationship.

The methodology employed in this project represents a modern form of biographical writing, "the new biography," that transgresses the conventions of classic biographical narratives.[9] The term "new biography" refers to a practice that relaxes the constraints of "evidence," uses such storytelling forms as dialogue and setting, and introduces uncertainty and speculation.[10] This methodology also builds upon an intersectional feminist life writing tradition that pushes back against the life writing genre canonized by a European Western literary tradition.[11] It renegotiates the parameters of "worthy" subjecthood and conceptions of individuality as white and male, and insists upon the interrelation of various categories of identity, such as race and gender. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's notion of autobiographical acts offers an analytic frame through which to interpret Elodie's self-representations in letters, blog posts, or interviews.[12] According to Smith and Watson, these "acts" are always symbolic

[9] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 8.
[10] Smith and Watson, 298.
[11] G. Thomas Couser's *Memoir: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Nigel Hamilton's *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) set out to define and trace the histories of these respective genres, and in doing so reaffirmed and privileged the origins of life writing within European and Christian traditions prior to Enlightenment in the West. Couser's genealogy of memoir and Hamilton's brief history of the biographical genre are heavily laden with male Euro-American subjecthood and follow a Eurocentric trajectory. Life writing as practice and as academic discipline has much evolved from this tradition as feminist scholars have challenged androcentric and Eurocentric norms within the genre. *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds) (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).
[12] Smith and Watson complicate and expand previous conceptions of the autobiographical act to include additional interactional and situational features such as: coaxers/occasions, sites, producers of the story, autobiographical "I"s,

exchanges in the world with cultural and historic specificity; they are rhetorical and addressed to an audience.[13] With this understanding in mind, I did not approach these materials as if they were simple, transparent, or able to "speak for themselves." Instead, I situated them in Elodie's cultural and migratory histories, and her family's post/colonial experience in Mauritius and in Canada.

While I draw heavily on feminist theories of auto/biography to analyze Elodie's and other participants' interviews, I not only mediate Elodie's life to a reader, I expose my own presence in the dissertation as friend, researcher, and writer. According to convention, autobiographers and memoirists tend to rely on their memories as evidence while biographers and historians attempt to maintain the professional norm of "objectivity" by creating distance from the material and restricting reference to themselves in the writing.[14] My own work, like that of other feminist and postcolonial theorists of life writing, challenges a rigid divide between biographical and autobiographical writing. Few biographers rely on personal memories of their subjects as appropriate evidence; however, my life-long friendship with Elodie served as a useful point of reference to recall details of the lives of both Elodie and her family. This was particularly true for the second chapter that covered Elodie's early years in Toronto. As a family friend of twenty-nine years, I am cognizant of the ways in which our enduring friendship situates me as anything but an "objective," distanced observer of Elodie's life. Indeed, it was my highly subjective relationship with Elodie and her family that inspired this project and informed my research questions. Like Elodie, I grew up in the same Chinatown neighborhood and attended the same predominantly Chinese neighborhood schools in Toronto. Elodie and I shared a similar status as

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the Others of autobiographical "I"s, voice, addressees, structuring modes of self-inquiry, patterns of employment, media, consumers/audiences, and paratextual frames. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography,* 64.

[13] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 63.

[14] Smith and Watson, 14.

Asian immigrants within a larger Chinese-Canadian diasporic community, even as we were cast as outsiders to that group. We attended the same schools (elementary through college), played on the same high school and club teams, and were recruited to the same Chinese volleyball league team. We faced many racially charged situations that ignited private conversations and "venting sessions" about our race and sense of belonging in Canada.[15]

This project, then, extends in new directions our lifelong critical dialogue about race, sport, and citizenship. I apply my reading of Elodie to a larger immigrant community, which further disrupts individualistic traditions of biographical writing. Sports biographies in particular often follow heavily prescribed narrative arcs: "rags to riches," "beating the odds," "struggle and triumph," and "hard work pays off." As Elodie's friend, it was tempting to tell these kinds of celebratory and clichéd narratives, or to defend her as a victim of oppression, but that was not the intention of the project. As a scholar, I have sought to disrupt formulaic ways of understanding postcolonial and marginal subjects. Elodie's story offered a unique window on these themes.

I draw upon the tradition of scholars of American Studies and Diaspora Studies in exploring patterns of migration and racialized forms of labor stemming from colonialism. The works of Lisa Lowe and Vijay Prashad inform my approach in situating Elodie and her family's connection to Africa.[16] Lowe and Prashad shed light on a lesser-known post-emancipation era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Asian indentured labor replaced slavery in many European colonies. Their scholarship insists on reaching beyond the triangulation of

[15] Our participation in the predominantly white Ontario volleyball league made us astutely aware of our racial Otherness. During our tournaments in rural Ontario, we endured racial slurs, parents harassing us, and food thrown our way—actions that succeeded in making us feel unwelcome in the league. Like Elodie, I also attained a Physical Education and Health degree from the University of Toronto. Our educational experience exposed us to critical ways of viewing our participation in sport as marked citizens in Canada, giving us the tools and language to have discussions about our oppression as well as our privileges.

[16] Lisa Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

Europe, the Americas, and Africa of the transatlantic slave trade to highlight the role of Asia in the construction of a modern, racialized labor system. It also highlights the transnationality of Asian subjects and the new forms of culture and identity that developed from colonial ruptures. Elodie's ancestral connection to Africa stems from this history and informs her unique diasporic trajectory.

The work of Lowe and Prashad, like my own, emerged under the influence of scholarship from the 1990s in Postcolonial and Diaspora Studies that decentered notions of home, homeland, and identity rooted in single place of origin.[17] Elodie's life story troubles such static concepts of "origin," "culture," or "home country." Her family's migratory trajectory from China to Mauritius to Canada disrupts readings of diaspora and immigrant narratives that privilege a binary sending-receiving framework. Elodie's own non-linear migratory path also uproots the idea that all diasporic subjects have a conception of "home" bound by actual or imagined geographies. Despite her Chinese ancestry, Elodie knows no Chinese dialects, and has no known relatives in China. The bulk of her extended kin live in Mauritius; remaining relatives are scattered through Europe, Africa, Australia, and North America. Her sense of "home" is plural rather than singular. Here, I draw from Anh Hua's discussion of diasporic imaginings whereby the increase in travel and migration in contemporary years obscures narratives of home and away. For some, like Elodie and her family, the journey itself becomes the familiar, the home.[18]

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[17] Vijay Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Rachel C. Lee, *The Americas of Asian American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); and Edwidge Danticat, *After the Dance: A Walk through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002).

[18] Anh Hua, "Homing Desire, Cultural Citizenship, and Diasporic Imaginings," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 50.

Although scholarship in the field of Diaspora Studies over the last several decades has challenged romantic imaginings of home, many immigrant narratives continue to idealize a desire to return to a homeland. Saidiya Hartman's work complicates the romantic yearning for the African motherland and informs my reading of Elodie's own complex return to Mauritius and to Africa as a continental representative in the Olympics. Elodie's experiences, like Hartman's, problematize nostalgic visits to the "homeland" that obscure slavery's legacies and disrupt dominant discourses that celebrate multiculturalism. Specifically, in chapter 3 I draw inspiration from the way Hartman unravels the fictions of desire around returns to the "homeland" through her personal pilgrimage to Ghana. Her evocation of a deep sense of discomfort and a lack of belonging during her travels in Ghana helped me to articulate Elodie's insider/outsider relationship with Mauritius.[19]

By contrast, dominant readings of the Asian homeland in Asian American literature tend to view or construct the "sending" nation as a static culture trapped in the tradition of gendered oppression. As this dissertation is, in part, a life writing project, I drew inspiration from Asian American life writers whose work refused dominant immigrant histories that essentialized Asian American identities. For instance, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Woman Among Ghosts* primed my approach to refuse gendered and racialized tropes about female Asian diasporic subjectivities. Kingston's work complicates the representation of China (or the homeland) as more oppressive than America, and challenges the idea that America is unequivocally the land of gendered liberation and opportunity for Asian females in diaspora. Kingston's work emboldens this dissertation's refusal to affirm dominant Asian American immigrant narratives. In addition, Lisa Lowe's attention to the way master narratives of

[19] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 56.

generational conflict and filial relations essentialize Asian American culture focused my attention on the particularities of class, gender, and national diversity among Asians immigrants.[20]

As many scholars have argued, multicultural rhetoric often works to essentialize differences and homogenize racial groups.[21] Elodie negotiated three distinct multicultural contexts—Mauritius, Canada, and the Olympics—each with its own rendition of a multicultural ideals. In this dissertation, the term "multicultural" does not mean simply the co-existence of different cultures in one region or state; rather, multiculturalism is predominantly a top-down effort, implemented by reluctant hosts to non-white immigrants, to create a spirit of acceptance and to celebrate cultural diversity.[22] Multiculturalism in Canada, as elsewhere, is not fixed discursively or in policy. In the years that Elodie came of age in Canada, multiculturalism evolved into a master narrative to address the nation's diversity, the surge in immigration, and the status of First Nations peoples.[23] The post-9/11 years ignited a societal re-examination of Canadian multiculturalism. It deepened divisions between national subjects and foreigners, and targeted aggression toward certain non-citizens along racial and religious lines.[24] In her global competitions, Elodie deployed a version of Canadian multiculturalism to assert her belonging in transnational athletic events, despite the way it glossed over her experiences with racism.

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[20] Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 63.
[21] Minoo Moallem and Iain A. Boal, "Multicultural Nationalism and the Poetic of Inauguration," in *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, ed. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcòn, and Minoo Moallem (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 244; Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, "Remembering Pearl Harbor, Reinforcing Vigilance," in *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 123; and Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura, *Asian Settler Colonialism from Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).
[22] Ali Rattansi, *Multiculturalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7. Rattansi views multiculturalism as a historical construct that emerged in Canada and Australia in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and that gained wide influence by the 1990s.
[23] May Chazan, Lisa Helps, Anna Stanley, and Sonali Thakkar, eds., *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2011), 2.
[24] Nandita Sharma, "Canadian Multiculturalism and Its Nationalisms," in Chazan et al., *Home and Native Land*, 99.

Multicultural rhetoric also emerged in Mauritius in the late 1960s as a form of state diversity management. It materialized during the movement of the country's independence from the British crown as a way to unite the country's multiethnic and multireligious population. The oral histories of Elodie's parents during the country's transition to independence illustrate both the making of "multicultural" Mauritius and the inability of this model to unify and equalize the state in subsequent decades. In both Canada and Mauritius, multicultural rhetoric purported to equalize hierarchies within a plural society, while in practice preserving and even creating hierarchies. Scholars have not yet adequately addressed the various modes and experiences of multiculturalism in nations differently positioned within global relations of power from the vantage points of diasporic subjects. In the tradition of scholarship on diaspora, settler colonialism, and immigrant narratives that push back against oversimplified notions of culture, my critique of multiculturalism draws attention to the paradox of celebrating "diversity" produced by violent colonial histories.[25]

While scholars have criticized multiculturalism as a state-sponsored practice of managing increasingly diverse populations, scholars of diaspora and métissage have emphasized the progressive energies of diasporic populations whose very existence challenges the boundaries of the nation-state. Elodie's athletic experiences speak to the progressive possibilities inherent in diaspora even as they highlight the hierarchies entrenched within diasporic communities. In addressing the ways that multiculturalism and the model minority myth serve to obscure hierarchies among non-dominant groups,[26] the concept of Asian settler colonialism also provides a useful perspective on Elodie's complicated assent to the Olympics. While Asian settler scholarship is localized to Hawai'i and focuses on the unequal relationship between Asians and

[25] Gonzalez, "Remembering Pearl Harbor," 123; and Fujikane and Okamura, *Asian Settler Colonialism*.
[26] Fujikane and Okamura, *Asian Settler Colonialism*.

Native Hawaiians, it underscores the maneuvering of diasporic Asians within colonial spaces that create gendered and ethnic hierarchies within and outside their communities. Elodie herself leveraged her relative privilege within her ethnic and religious communities as a strategy to increase her competitiveness even as she struggled to foster a sense of belonging within her various diasporic and athletic communities.

In the context of the Olympics and its paradoxical nationalist celebration of globalization, I benefit from scholars attuned to immigrancy, citizenship, and transnationality. Here, Monisha Das Gupta's scholarship complicates the black-white framework of race relations in North America and identifies a transnational complex of rights that contends with the daily power of borders in the lived experiences of immigrants. Das Gupta's engagement of citizenship as an analytical structure of power in the contemporary context of increasing transnational subjects turned my attention to how nationality and nationalism are embodied experiences, as is gender, race, and sexuality.[27] In chapters three and four, I lean on Aihwa Ong's conception of "flexible citizenship," referring to how Asian investors have accumulated capital and have flowed between national borders in response to changing global markets.[28] Rather than looking at mobile business professionals, as Ong does, my dissertation considers the global Olympic structure that has encouraged athletes, like Elodie, to benefit from the organization's celebration of Olympians as cultural ambassadors and transnationally mobile subjects. Like Ong's work, Elodie's story contributes to our understanding of transnationalism as inseparable from modern

[27] Monisha Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 257.
[28] Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 6.

statecraft and contemporary nationalism, even as it highlights individual agency in the large-scale movement of people and cultures across borders. [29]

Furthermore, my analysis of Elodie's participation in the North American, African, European, and global sport contexts contributes to the emerging scholarship on transnational and diasporic athletes. Physical Cultural Studies engages with concerns of the physical body, particularly examining the spaces bodies occupy, the way they represent meanings beyond the individual, and their entanglement in power relations. As such, this dissertation converses with the collective work of authors from *Race and Sport in Canada: Intersecting Inequalities* who investigate Canada's sporting culture as both a site of resistance and as a space that reproduces the country's legacy of colonial oppression. Like the authors in this anthology, my dissertation explores the role of multicultural rhetoric in Canadian sporting identities.[30] Asian American and Asian Canadian scholars have long examined the legacy of constructing Asians outside of the national body. This foreignness has also extended to sporting environments. My examination of Elodie's athletic journey contributes to the growing body of scholarship that investigates Asian American sporting cultures as a site of both *exclusion* and *inclusion*.[31] Like the authors of *Asian American Sporting Cultures,* I view Asian Americans' engagement with sport as a complex site of racial formation, reiteration or resistance of racial logics, social, political, and national belonging and exclusion, sexual and gendered normativity, and religious identities.[32]

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[29] Elodie accessed and benefited from Asian settler networks in Canada, Mauritius, and Europe to persist as an Olympian.
[30] Janelle Joseph, Simon Darnell, and Yuka Nakamura, introduction to *Race and Sport in Canada: Intersecting Inequalities*, ed. Janelle Joseph, Simon Darnell, and Yuka Nakamura (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2012), 6.
[31] Lisa Lowe, "Afterward: 'Competing against Type,'" in *Asian American Sporting Cultures,* ed. Stanley I. Thangaraj, Constancio Arnaldo, and Christina B. Chin (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 250.
[32] Lowe, 249.

Feminist Biography and Feminist Ethnography as Ethical Practice

In situating Elodie within broader communities—ethnic, athletic, national, diasporic—this dissertation follows pathways charted by feminist ethnographers and auto-ethnographers, as well as by feminist biographers and literary theorists. Scholars such as Diane Freedman and Olivia Frey, whose work insists on the validity and emergence of autobiographical criticism, and self-inclusive scholarship enabled my approach to this project. Their identification of the on-going tensions within academe about the validity of personal experience and the autobiographical nature of knowledge helped me to articulate my authorial positionality in this form of scholarship.[33] Further, Trinh Minh-Ha's investigation of postcolonial processes and the writing of postcoloniality, served as a reminder that feminist writing and making of theory must remain tied to the politics of everyday life, "thereby re-writing the ethnic female subject as site of differences."[34] Early collections such as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* expanded my own understanding of life stories as worthy of academic investigation.[35] In *This Bridge We Call Home*—a reflection on the impact of *This Bridge Called My Back* two decades later—Cynthia Franklin asserts the transformative influence this seminal text has had on students and readers since the 1980s.[36] Franklin argues that academic memoirs are indebted to this text, which provided a model for marginalized groups of women to assert their individual and collective identities. I count this dissertation among them.[37]

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[33] Diane P. Freedman and Olivia Frey, eds., *Autobiographical Writing across the Disciplines: A Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 8.
[34] Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other*, 44.
[35] *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 2nd ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds), (Latham, NY: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1983).
[36] Cynthia Franklin, "Recreating *This Bridge* in an Anti-affirmative Action Era: Literary Anthology, Academic Memoir, and Institutional Autobiography," in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformations*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 416.
[37] Franklin, 425.

I used interviews with Elodie and her family to examine not only Elodie's athletic journey and her evolving interpretations of that experience, but also her family's experience of immigration from Mauritius within the broader community of Asian immigrants in Toronto. The project drew most heavily upon Elodie's memories, both close and distant. Sensitive to the dynamic and unstable nature of memory, I aimed less to verify the "truth" of her memories than to contextualize Elodie's experiential truths. In particular, I paid attention to where and how Elodie situated her autobiographical "I"s—a multivocal and multipositional self-signifier that is attached to various identities and subject positions that the narrator takes up to tell her story.[38] Sometimes Elodie spoke as an athlete, at other times as a daughter or immigrant subject. Even Elodie's identity as an athlete engaged various temporal, historical, and ideological perspectives.[39]

My ability to work with such fluid contextual parameters and situate my own positionality in relation to Elodie were possible because of the critically successful work of women of color ethnographers before me. Irma McClaurin's anthology *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics* is one of the first texts that opened possible paths of approaches to this highly subjective project about Elodie within her communities. Black feminist ethnographic tradition turns the critical gaze onto the scholars themselves and incorporates the researchers' own experiences to inform their scholarship. Ethnographic work from this tradition seeks to disrupt elitist, sexist, and racist dynamics inherent in traditional anthropology while carving out intellectual space for critical work. While reflexively stating one's position relative to her informants does not eradicate structural hierarchies, it is an attempt

[38] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 80.
[39] Leigh Gilmore argues that subjects are always situated in larger historical, social, and political contexts. Leigh Gilmore, *Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 90.

to identify power differences and invites a more critical and holistic reading of these scholars' work and interventions.

Ruth Baher's and Kia Lilly Caldwell's scholarship illustrate the limits and possibilities of critical feminist ethnographic work. For instance, in *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*, Behar frequently speaks of her socioeconomic privilege in relation to her "subject," Esperanza, and how they both navigated that difference.[40] Although the socioeconomic "differences" that divide Elodie and me are far less marked, Behar's work demonstrates how investigating class as one of the most consequential vectors of power is best illustrated in its interpersonal dynamics between two people. Elodie's dual-parental income household, versus my single-parent household, mattered in how we negotiated our immigrancy and accessed sport in Canada. I also took inspiration from the way Behar translated and transported Esperanza's story, both literally and figuratively, co-producing a narrative of Esperanza's testimony that insists on its scholarly significance. Caldwell's work, *Negras in Brazil: Re-envisioning Black Women, Citizenship, and the Politics of Identity*, also offered an important example of how one's positionality and reflexivity in ethnographic research can evolve.[41] Like Caldwell, I took for granted that I had "insider" status by virtue of sharing the same race as my "subject." I assumed that our shared Chinatown community, Toronto schools, and athletic experiences would make it easy to understand and document Elodie's experiences. I was wrong.

One particular interview with Elodie on March 29, 2016 serves as an important reminder of the challenge to honor *her* truth and of the significance of self-reflection on the responsibility

[40] Ruth Behar, *Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003).
[41] Kia Lilly Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil: Re-envisioning Black Women, Citizenship, and the Politics of Identity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

of mediating another person's story. Back in 2013, Elodie had articulated the importance of Continental Qualifiers and their significance for inclusivity. For her, that was the spirit of the Games. I had been moved and persuaded by her conviction that the competition was not fair, particularly for those representing less wealthy nations like Mauritius. I had built my dissertation prospectus largely based on this premise. But as the years passed, Elodie grew increasingly ambivalent about her Olympic experience. In one difficult interview on March 29, 2016, she expressed that she did not deserve to be an Olympian because she had qualified through the African Continental Cup. She now saw her "diversity" entry as a handout that displaced higher-ranked teams. She had not, she felt, earned her spot in the Olympics through merit since she was not among the top twenty-four world-ranked teams. Sport in her new narrative was no longer structured by inequalities; it was inherently just and colorblind—an interpretation directly at odds with my own. In the moment, I responded by attempting to console her by telling her—no, arguing with her—that she absolutely deserved to compete in the Olympics. Rather than honoring her words, I sought to change Elodie's opinion about herself and about the Olympics. I insisted that her pathway to the Olympics was about equity, not equality. We both emerged from the interview upset and confused about what precisely had transpired. As I transcribed this interview, I could fully hear my resistance to her shifting narrative, and began to reflect on its significance for my own research ethics.

As painful as it was, I forced myself to listen to and reread the transcript of that interview several times. It was a transformative experience in my research approach, but more importantly, in our friendship. I felt again the slippery nature of doing research about a friend. I realized that I had fallen back into an old dynamic from our youth: I, the know-it-all, and she (in my perspective) the naïve one. Had Elodie been a distant research informant, I would have never

taken the liberty to impose my opinion about how she should view her own Olympic experience. That would have been poor form at best and unethical at worst. I had also disrespected our friendship. From that interview, I am grateful for how Elodie persisted in telling me her truth, although it fell on deaf ears at the time. She did not acquiesce to my well-meaning but misguided attempts console her. She conducted herself like a professional participating in an interview about her athletic career. Luckily for me, it was not her first time fielding other people's projections of *her* experience at the Olympics. I questioned whether I might on other occasions in our history have thoughtlessly been an ungracious listener. I wondered if my research was a sham. It took me many weeks and an apology before I could move beyond this interview to believe again in this project. As I forged ahead with research and writing, this incident served as a reminder to maintain loyalty to Elodie's testimony even as it sometimes challenged the arguments that I thought I would make in this dissertation.

Collecting "Data"

With a dissertation that drew inspiration and methods from multiple fields, the research process itself also took unexpected turns. I submitted this project to the University's Internal Review Board (IRB) for exempt status, which was not a straightforward process since I was using existing data and my interviewees were not anonymous.[42] As Craig Howes explains, ethnography generally complies with IRB standards of practice because its subjects are chosen to be representative of a larger community, and therefore anonymity can be granted. But with oral history, the value lies in its specificity—the particular story of the subject is foregrounded against a backdrop of group or cultural identity. Therefore, it is Elodie (and to some extent her

[42] Although the IRB had previously told me that my project did not qualify as human subjects research and therefore did not need IRB approval, I insisted on submitting an application. At the very least I needed formalized approval from the university stating I did not need IRB oversight to conduct my research.

family) who grants narrative authority to this dissertation.[43] In this respect, my approach to the interview process mirrored that of oral historians.

Linda Tuhiwai-Smith stresses the importance of the *process* of research as most important in community-based and indigenous scholarship. The process must be respectful and enable healing and education.[44] For these reasons, I have not only asked permission to use interview material and checked the accuracy of transcripts with Elodie and her family, I also returned to Elodie all drafts of the chapters and all research activities throughout the process since the inception of the project.[45] Elodie then let me know of any details she wanted to have removed or elaborated. We would also discuss the arc of each chapter and how I might incorporate quotes.

Throughout the interviewing process, I had mixed feelings about using a tape recorder—especially during my conversations with Elodie and her family. It is unsurprising that ethnographers and life writers before me have reflected in their writing on their use of a tape recorder. For instance, Behar wrote about the tape recorder she used to document her conversations with Esperanza. So did Elizabeth Burgos-Debray who collected Rigoberta Menchu's testimony in *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala.* In *Maus*, Art Spiegleman illustrates an instance when he tried to record a conversation with his father about his imprisonment in a concentration camp while his father exercised on a stationary bicycle.[46] Like these authors, I found the tape recorder served as a vital yet precarious tool. On the most basic level, the tape recorder allowed me to review conversations and ensured that I would not misquote anyone. It offered a level of assurance to my interviewees that my research was

[43] Craig Howes, "Asking Permission to Write: Human Subject Research," *Profession,* (2011): 100.
[44] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012), 130.
[45] I transcribed and emailed all recorded interviews to interviewees for their review.
[46] Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Pantheon, 1996), 73.

legitimate. For interviewees with whom I had less of a personal relationship, the tape recorder usually functioned as a welcomed "back up" to our conversations. On another level, I became cognizant of the way the tape recorder instantly shifted the tone of conversations—especially with Elodie and her family. I noticed that when I taped my conversations with Elodie, we both spoke more formally, as if we were in a university seminar. Although we had no audience, the tape recorder reminded us that the conversation was in fact for an audience—and we spoke accordingly. The tape recorder did not necessarily change Elodie's responses to my questions since for all our recorded interviews, there was little Elodie said that she had not already shared in personal "off record" conversations. But how she articulated them differed. She would attempt to qualify more of her statements for the invisible audience when the recorder was on. Unlike most feminist ethnographers and life writers—whose relationships with their subjects generally move toward personal closeness—I felt as though the tape recorder shifted my interaction with Elodie toward formality.

Since my relationship with Elodie is different than that of most researchers to their subjects, my approach to building respect and trust also differed. I have known Elodie since 1989. We have seen each other through life's important moments: love, loss, victories, and failures. I did not need to "break down barriers" to gain her confidence and trust as other researchers had described. After all, Elodie and I had been having self-reflexive conversations about our athletic experiences and identities for as long as we could remember. My concern was not with how to break down walls and gain access; instead, I felt adamant about building protective boundaries around our friendship—so much so that prior to the prospectus defense, Elodie and I had a series of conversations about how this project might impact our friendship. Though I knew instinctively which topics were off limits, I felt compelled to state and confirm

them with Elodie. With project-related communication, I generally used my school email account, and scheduled specific times and hours where we would explicitly talk about "the project" so as to prevent all of our interactions from becoming "data." Undoubtedly, we have had many "off-record" conversations that inspired themes in this dissertation, like the time that she confided her sense of nostalgia and exclusion from the African diaspora exhibit during a visit to the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.

The interviewing process with Elodie's parents also presented some complex challenges to my research. Despite the years that I have known Eddy and Hélène, I had rarely asked them questions about their upbringing, their life in Mauritius, their immigration to Canada, or their familial relationships. I had learned in childhood that asking my elders personal questions signaled disrespect, yet this dissertation required I pry directly into the lives of Elodie's parents. The project offered me an exciting opportunity to better know Hélène and Eddy, but asking a simple question like, "Why did you move to Canada?" felt distasteful. Not surprisingly, the first interview elicited long silences and awkward laughs. Over time, subsequent interviews felt slightly more comfortable, but never truly organic.

My discussions with Hélène and Eddy were most enriching and informative absent the recorder—at spontaneous moments when we were attempting to say our goodbyes and one of them would share a childhood memory, or when we were out eating dim sum. I would sometimes write notes about those instances, but that always felt a little sneaky. Unlike my interviews with Elodie, I rarely interviewed Hélène or Eddy alone (though we have had individual non-recorded discussions). In those group interviews, family members would interrupt, stories tumbling on top of each other, while the language shifted rapidly between English and Créole. When Elodie later translated the Créole, it was clear that those sidebar

conversations were not intended for my ears. My questions sometimes elicited difficult memories about family trauma, migration, or fragmented histories. In the tradition of self-reflexivity in feminist ethnography, I had to consider my responsibility of asking these triggering questions and their impact on my relationship with the Li Yuk Lo family. When I brought up this concern with Hélène in a conversation about her adoption, she reassured me that no one would share anything they did not feel comfortable sharing with me for this project.

In fact, Eddy and Hélène were quite generous with the stories of their lives and family. They allowed me to make digital copies of their respective family tree albums. Eddy's family album started with his earliest ancestors in Mauritius in the late 1800s. One of Eddy's cousin's—Koon Yin Florence Lew Hing Geng—had embarked on the arduous journey of piecing together the family's births, marriages, children, and deaths in one thirty-six-page album. Interspersed between the flow charts of families were a handful of group pictures.[47] From this album, I could see the instant colonial impact on Elodie's earliest ancestors through the changes in their names, which I discuss in chapter 1. Eddy's cousin had also documented immigration from China and emigration out of Mauritius. Suffice it to say, this album propelled my inquiries and gave Elodie's diasporic positionality historical and personal context. Hélène's family album contained more photographs, including some from the mid-twentieth century. It did not have detailed family trees, but the photographs offered its own stories of the family's settlement in Mauritius. Peering into both sets of family archives, I sometimes felt as though I was trespassing on the lives of the distant and deceased. I wondered if any of them had reflected on their lives as part of this expansive global movement of people and colonial power. Would they have recoiled at a

[47] The pictures were taken from the 1970s onward. Eddy had remarked that his family did not have many pictures from earlier since they could not afford the cost of taking pictures.

woman of Japanese descent analyzing their histories for a U.S.-based colonial institution? Would they have seen me as that distanced academic doing research *on* colonial subjects?

Exploring formal archives at the Olympic Studies Centre (OSC) in Switzerland and the British Library felt most like what I would imagine as traditional American Studies research. But negotiating the archives, too, required creativity and imagination. I started at the (OSC) where I met with the archivist I had spoken with weeks prior. Elodie, a living subject and relatively low-profile Olympian, had few catalogued archives at the OSC. She was not "searchable" like the U.S. beach volleyball star Misty May-Trainor. The OSC library contained a unique collection of books, bids for the Olympics, videos, and ephemera from the span of the modern Games.[48] These were important because I was also interested in the racialized and gendered discourses of the three London Olympics, the historical context of beach volleyball, and histories of the regional competitions that contextualized Elodie's assent to the Olympics for my third and fourth chapters. In essence, exploring archives for this dissertation required investigating detailed aspects of Elodie's contexts and their histories. I looked at documents showing Mauritian efforts to acquire membership in the IOC; reports and debates concerning the All-Africa Games and Indian Ocean Island Games; programs, speeches, and brochures from the 1908 and 1948 London Olympics; correspondences about beach volleyball's inaugural presence in the centennial 1996 Olympics; and ephemera such as media guides, rule books, and event booklets for the 2012 beach volleyball event. Archival research involved stitching together incongruent threads of contemporary and historical details that culminated in Elodie's journey to the Olympics.

I faced similar challenges in my archival quest at the British Library. Elodie and her ancestral cohort were not "searchable," nor were there curated collections or indexes. When

[48] The International Olympic Committee documents and correspondences are embargoed from the public for 20 years, which limited the types of archives I accessed for the 2012 Games.

working with the librarians I had initially asked for help looking for materials in two seemingly disparate areas: London's history of hosting the Olympics; and archives of British Mauritius and its independence. I explained how my research "subject" linked those two queries together. But, the moment I uttered the word "beach" as in beach volleyball to those helping me, they started to draw their own connections. The librarians knew of Mauritius as a popular tropical tourist destination. Much like the fantasies of Hawai'i that circulate in the continental U.S., for the English, Mauritius conjures lush greenery and warm sandy beaches. The history of European colonialism in Mauritius seemed erased from Britain's contemporary memory. Nonetheless, I uncovered a modest amount of material pertaining to the eventual independence of Mauritius from the English Crown. Also, the British Library housed municipal documents pertaining to hosting the Games and documentation of the protests, support, controversies, and legacies of the three London Olympics. The library also kept extensive newspaper archives from the three Olympics, coverage of Mauritius' independence in 1968, and a collection of major English and French newspapers from Mauritius since British rule. From this assortment, I drew broader perspective of the colony's struggle for and debates around independence that informed Eddy and Hélène's diasporic migratory trajectory, which I discuss in chapter 1.

When financial constraints and family responsibilities prevented me from traveling to Mauritius in May 2017 as planned, Elodie and her family immediately stepped into the breach, offering to help with archival research on their own three-week trip to Mauritius. They helped me to purchase two books on the Chinese in Mauritius that sold only in Port Louis, and photographed newspaper coverage of the country's first attendance at the Olympic and Indian Ocean Games. They visited the Mauritian National Archives to locate immigration and voyaging records of their ancestors to Mauritius. From Mauritius, Elodie and her sister Kimmy texted me

annotated pictures of family and feasts, claiming that hunting down old articles was like doing detective work. Eddy had read the books I requested and shared his findings with family members. Hélène asked her extended family more about their shared history. Eddy, Hélène, Elodie, and Kimmy together revisited old neighborhoods and sites. Hélène in particular confided that my dissertation was making her and the family more curious about their histories. She told me that this project had inspired her to ask family members questions and look into some of the texts and archives about the country. The Li Yuk Lo family became not only my research "subject," but also my researcher partner.

In the tradition of feminist biography and feminist ethnography, this dissertation and the stories within it were constructed collaboratively. Although my prospectus laid out a series of arguments and chapter descriptions, my commitment has always been to Elodie's testimony and to that of her family. As I began work on the first two chapters, Elodie clarified the significance of her parents and ancestral roots in Mauritius for her personal and athletic growth. Eddy and Hélène—unlike my own relatives—had openly recounted their histories to their children. Elodie treasured the times when her parents sat around with extended family ruminating on their childhoods in Mauritius. When I began the process of interviewing Eddy and Hélène, my intent was to recount their support for Elodie's Olympic journey and to include contextual information about her ancestral ties to Mauritius. Their testimony ended up giving deeper meaning to Elodie's stories and profoundly shifted the trajectory of this dissertation. I had not planned to write an entire chapter dedicated to Hélène's and Eddy's recollections of their own and family's diasporic journeys, but I could not ignore how their stories gave life to Elodie's existence in Canada, her complicated return to Mauritius, and her eventual role as an athletic ambassador for Mauritius. This new first chapter on the diasporic history of Elodie's family ushered the project

toward a more compelling demonstration of Elodie's evolving identity in various athletic contexts. As Eddy and Hélène helped give Elodie a sense of belonging in her migrations and in her journey toward the Olympics, their testimony has given Elodie's narrative belonging in a broader global history within this project.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation follows the arc of Elodie's history starting from her earliest ancestors in Mauritius through to her experience at the 2012 London Olympics, and beyond. The oral histories in the first chapter establish the migration of Elodie's ancestors to Mauritius. This juncture in the family's history is where Elodie first situates herself as a complicated diasporic subject, and as such it serves as a foundation for discussing her transnational journeys through sport. The remaining three chapters contain two unifying threads: Elodie's negotiation with the identities that she inherited or were projected onto her; and evolution of the identities that she chose to inhabit. My primary commitment has been to Elodie's testimony of her athletic career, which intimately engages broad theoretical concerns about the world of competitive sport that offered her both opportunity and constraint as she sought a sense of belonging in Canada, Mauritius, and the Olympics. The chapters gradually uncover the complexities of representing a nation in multicultural and transnational settings such as the Olympics. Rather than adopting the distanced voice of a traditional biographer, the dissertation intentionally entwines the interview process itself throughout each chapter as a reminder of the unique methodology that informs this project. The distinct set of materials for each chapter called for a unique blend of methods, theoretical considerations, and rhetorical presentations. The loose chronology of the dissertation moves the narrative forward, but the various issues in Elodie's stories that get raised between and within chapters require specific theoretical and methodological attention.

The first chapter, "The Intimacies of Home" (late 1800s to 1989), sweeps through Mauritian cultural, labor, and political history through the perspectives of Elodie and her Chinese Hakka ancestors. It argues that the notion of home shared by Elodie and her family refers to long traditions of migration and ongoing processes of creolization rather than to a fixed place. They thus serve to disrupt dominant constructions of home in diasporic narratives. Prashad's and Lowe's scholarship on the construction of Asian indentured laborers in the wake of abolition serves as the chapter's theoretical frame. However, unlike Lowe's work, I rooted my inquiry and drew material from the colonial periphery. And unlike Prashad's work, I used oral history methods to capture the family's testimony that allows us to rethink dominant paradigms of migration by drawing our attention to complex diasporic histories and the intimate effects of colonialism. I analyzed Hélène's and Eddy's personal archives, along with Mauritian newspapers and various cultural material from around the time of the country's 1968 independence to situate the family's oral history within their broader diasporic trajectory.

The second chapter, "Competing Identities" (1989 to 2006), asserts that for marginalized subjects, the nuanced workings of the belief in meritocracy in competitive sport is both a source of agency and oppression. I narrate Elodie's participation in competitive volleyball in Canada to demonstrates how the ideology of meritocracy conceals and normalizes Canadian hierarchical constructions of non-white bodies within white settler culture. In the context of marginalization in sport, Elodie develops her identity as an athlete above all else. While not explicit in the chapter, I drew upon my shared memories of key athletic instances with Elodie to further draw out critical themes in her testimony. The work of Physical Cultural Studies scholars concerned with sporting contexts as a site for constructing national and foreign bodies in Canada and the U.S., frames this chapter's discussion. Specifically, Yuka Nakamura's ethnographic findings on

the annual North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament ground Elodie's participation in this league as an instrumental site for her cultural and athletic development in Canada.

The third chapter, "The Unromantic Homecoming" (2006 to 2011), follows Elodie's journey back to Mauritius to play for the indoor volleyball national team and to find a beach volleyball partner to tour Africa and Europe. Her difficult "returns" to Mauritius and Africa confirm the insights of scholars who problematize the "homeland" as a site of nostalgia and desire. Elodie's experiences add new dimensions to the analysis, given her multiple migratory histories. Saidiya Hartman's theoretical concern with fictions of nostalgic returns to the African "homeland" frames the chapter. Elodie's Chinese ethnicity and bi-national status challenged her legitimacy as a representative of Mauritius and as an African competitor vying for an Olympic berth via the African Continental Trial. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Danger of a Single Story" also offers theoretical support for articulating Elodie's struggle for a sense of belonging: her fight against singular narratives of Africa, Mauritius, and herself. However, as a Chinese settler in contested and colonized spaces, Elodie was entangled in vestiges of colonial hierarchies that positioned her ethnicity above that of black Mauritians. The context of international beach volleyball left little room for critical engagement of the sociopolitical issues that confronted Elodie in Africa. This chapter bears witness to Elodie's reflections on her ascent to the Olympics through an obscure and problematic qualification route—the African Continental Cup.

The final chapter, "Embodying the Olympics" (2011 and 2012), elucidates how Elodie's berth into the Games through the Continental Cup had encouraged a new kind of transnational

athletic entrepreneurialism.[49] This journey to the Olympics privileged relatively elite, mobile, and cosmopolitan subjects—in Elodie's case—subjects of color who had the economic and cultural capital to take advantage of diversity initiatives. Aihwa Ong's notion of flexible citizenship is a useful framework to articulate the malleable attitudes toward citizenship and the new kinds of valorized subjectivities in international sports contexts.[50] While African competitors and officials found Elodie's flexible transnational identity and relative ethnic privilege unfair, Western organizers such as the FIVB and the Olympics celebrated Elodie as a beneficiary of an inclusion project. Her presence bolstered uncritical imaginings of a multicultural and globalized world. However, Elodie's unique berth to and experience at the Games left her with a sense of shame. Elodie felt as though she was a "guest" rather than a serious competitor, and therefore underserving of the title "Olympian." Her first-person account at the 2012 Games exposes the production of transnational athletic subjects who perform the interests of the organization's ideals of a globalized world through corporate consumption.

I end this dissertation by situating Elodie in her current work as a Christian missionary for *Athletes in Action* where she continues to negotiate her multiple identities in Canada, within her organization, and the countries she visits such as Nigeria, Paraguay, Russia, and Costa Rica. I reflect on the question, "Where *does* Elodie belong?" amidst nationalist concerns around borders, immigration, and citizenship, even as I unpack the process of doing research about a close personal friend. To close the entire dissertation, Elodie shares her reflections on being my academic "subject" through one final exit interview.

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[49] The "universality rule" and the Continental Cup are directives aimed to ensure diverse global representation in beach volleyball.

[50] Ong, *Flexible Citizenship.* Aihwa Ong's scholarship on flexible citizenship speaks to how cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions. However, Ong uses this term to refer to the strategies of transnational Chinese business professionals (not athletes) seeking to both circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work, and family relocation.

While my academic obligation in writing this dissertation is to produce original knowledge and advance scholarship, my personal commitment has been to co-construct an account with Elodie of her unique diasporic and athletic journeys. In so doing, the dissertation blurs the boundaries of authorship and bridges the divide between biography, autobiography, and ethnography. The specific ways in which this project inhabits the borderlands of genres, recounting a life story rooted in diasporic histories that illuminate questions of current scholarly debate, itself constitutes an intervention. I thus open this dissertation with personal memories from childhood that reveal the early evolution of my friendship with Elodie. These recollections inspired many of this project's critical questions and became the foundation of this dissertation, for they uncovered the shared and divergent immigrant histories that drove my theoretical engagements with diasporic subjectivities and identity formation. I hope that this project has offered Elodie, as it has for me, some opportunity to bring clarity and peace to the moments in her life that challenged her sense of identity and belonging in this world.

Same Difference

In April of 1989, the halls of Ogden Elementary School in Toronto buzzed with rumors of a new student from Africa. Our school had few black kids, and fewer new immigrants from Africa. But when Elodie arrived at Ogden at the end of her grade two year, we wondered, where was the new kid from Africa? The school, located in the southern end of Toronto's largest Chinatown, served mostly Chinese immigrants. Ethnically, Elodie fit in. But she wasn't like the other Chinese kids. For starters, she had a French name. Ogden students treated Elodie, as they did most newcomers, with a mix of suspicion and curiosity.

I was no exception.

I wish that this story of my friendship with Elodie started with an instant bond between us. She was my best friend from childhood after all. In truth, for the first few years I felt indifferent toward her, at best. I was one grade above her and Ogden Elementary School teachers and administrators knew my family well. My older sister was soon graduating from the school and my little brother was in Ogden's daycare program. My mother attended PTA meetings and volunteered. It was more my school than hers.

My family was one of the only Japanese Canadian families at Ogden, with its overwhelmingly Chinese immigrant student population. My mother never missed an opportunity to explain to my teachers the differences between Japanese and Chinese culture and customs. One year, she even had the whole school fold paper cranes and read *Sadako and the 1,000 Paper Cranes* to commemorate World War II atrocities against Japanese civilians. At home, I grew up learning not to cross my *hashi* when I ate so as not to be mistaken for Chinese.

Chineseness may have been the norm at Ogden, but beyond the school grounds, we were all outsiders to Canada. The "Stop Racism" posters that lined Ogden's hallways only served as a reminder that many in Canada didn't celebrate our difference or presence. We all found ways to shed marks of our "fobby-ness." Born, as I was, in Canada of Japanese—not Chinese—ancestry, I felt slightly more "special" than most students at Ogden. Many schoolmates anglicized their names, but I knew that I was more Canadian and did not have to change my name to prove so—even though I privately begged my mom if I could use the name Carole.

Most Chinese students attended the Chinese enrichment classes that Ogden offered several times a week. My mother wanted me to learn a bit of Chinese because the written language had some overlap with Japanese *kanji* characters, so I was forced to attend too. As was Elodie. While students who were native speakers sat at desks, Elodie and I had to sit on the faded carpet that barely cushioned the cement tiles underneath. *Chan seen san, jyo san* (Good morning teacher Chan) we would intone at the beginning of each lesson as we bowed our heads. I loathed Chinese class and hated sitting on the carpet with Elodie, who was painfully shy and barely spoke English. The few students lucky enough not to take Cantonese lessons were in Concurrent, a class with Ms. Davis who taught art, music, and the ukulele. Ms. Davis was young, pretty, easy-going, and loved her students—a stark contrast to Mrs. Chan with her austere style of teaching.

Not long after her arrival at Ogden, Elodie became a subject of conversation both at school and at home. "Why did Elodie get to switch to Concurrent class and not me?" I whined to my mom and teachers. Elodie was not Chinese like the other students, I was told. She didn't come from China. She came from a place in Africa that spoke French, kind of. She

spoke Créole, a mix of many languages, but especially French, I was told. The few French phrases I knew did little to bridge the communication gap. But figuring out how to chat with Elodie was not a huge concern at the time since I was still figuring out if she was too different to befriend. Yet Elodie was unique. Not only was her name French rather than Chinese, her parents, grandparents, and great grandparents had French names too. Neither she nor her family spoke any Chinese dialect. They looked nothing like the Africans I'd learned about on Sesame Street with guests from Kenya, or World Vision commercials. They weren't black, they didn't have African sounding names, and they didn't seem famished. Whatever Elodie was, she didn't fit at Ogden, even if being Chinese was the norm.

At Ogden, no one criticized if you brought rice and Chinese sausage for lunch or smelled like incense. Although I wasn't Chinese, I lived near Chinatown and looked Chinese enough. I brought Chinese snacks to school, and eating Chinese snacks meant you were in-the-know. Western snacks, on the other hand, were a commodity. During recess, we'd trade strips of spiced cuttlefish for a few M&Ms, haw flakes for salty rice crackers, and shrimp chips for gummy worms. Elodie had yet to show us what food she had to trade at recess. Did she even know about Ribena juice or *li-hing* covered dried plums? Did they sell those things in Africa?

Elodie overshadowed my own specialness as one of the only Japanese Canadian students at school. And so when Kenneth, an older student known as *Dai-Lo*, (big brother or boss), ridiculed Elodie, I hadn't yet decided if Elodie was friend or foe. "What are you wearing? Ha ha ha. Where do you even get clothes like that?" He stared at Elodie's grey sweater with fluorescent color-blocked green and orange patches. It was one of the few sweaters Elodie owned at the time. I laughed along as Kenneth poked and shoved Elodie,

hoping he wouldn't notice my frayed pants—hand-me-downs from my sister—or my shoes that my mother had bought at Bi-Way, a popular bargain store in Toronto.

Better her than me.

But fate kept pushing us together. My mother started dropping my brother and me off at the Li Yuk Lo's in the mornings before school. She was a single mom with early shift work and no one to take us to Ogden. Bleary-eyed, my mother dragged my younger brother and me for the longest half-kilometer through Grange Park toward Elodie's home at 50 Stephanie Street. The apartment building constantly battled pests on each of its twenty-something floors. The fragrance of sautéing ginger, garlic, or stir-fried meats mixed with incense filled the hallways. Many students from Ogden lived in the 50 Stephanie Street building where we played hide and seek on the weekends when the weather pushed us indoors.

Elodie's parents, Hélène and Eddy, welcomed us into their ground-level, one-bedroom apartment. Elodie and her younger sister, Kimmy, were still asleep when we got there. Elodie's grandparents lived in the apartment too, and would usually be sitting on the couch watching TV when we entered. The grandparents shifted to make space for my brother and me. We were caught in the crossfires of the family's morning hustle commands. "Nioun, Kim. Levé. Paré pou ale lekol!" Eddy would say loudly. Were Elodie and Kimmy in trouble? Or did they just speak louder in Africa? Why did we have to walk to school with them? My brother and I usually sat on the couch playing with Kimmy and Elodie's expensive toys. They had Game Boy and Sega Genesis. Hélène and Eddy would

offer us food. Sometimes we would accept a boxed soybean drink, but usually we declined in order to be as little a burden as possible. Whatever ambivalence I had about Elodie, cordiality was being thrust upon us.

Elodie started showing up to my extracurricular activities—especially the after-school sports programs. There, she didn't have to speak much English. Besides, the extracurricular sports crowd was more mixed than the typical Ogden classroom. We were a motley group of mostly non-Chinese immigrants from around the world. These were my people, and Elodie was encroaching on my turf. She was good at sports too and sport was my thing. I was the athletic girl who kept up with the boys. Luckily, we were sporty in different ways. I was fast and agile. She was strong and tactical. As it turned out, we complemented each other on the field and court. Finally, another girl who didn't throw like one.

With every tournament or meet, I felt like our team was a fleet on a mission scoping out the world beyond Chinatown's perimeter. Sometimes the athletes were excused from school early to travel to matches. It was the best when we got to get up in the middle of an afternoon lesson and walk out the classroom door while most everyone else stayed behind. I would giggle in the hallway along with my teammates who were equally excited at the novelty of walking the unsupervised halls. Maybe Elodie and I had something in common after all.

For as long as I could remember, when anyone asked Elodie, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" she'd answer, "an Olympian." We were all enchanted by the grandeur of the Games but for Elodie it wasn't about what she wanted to be but what she would be. The problem was that Elodie didn't yet have a sport that would take her there.

Then in 1993, the movie Cool Runnings took Canada by storm. Canadians couldn't resist the Disney flick featuring the country's own John Candy and the 1988 Calgary Olympics as the backdrop. Neither could Elodie. She could now learn a cold weather sport in Canada but represent tropical Mauritius just as the Jamaican bobsled team had done. It was kismet.

By my final year at Ogden, I was hanging out with Elodie beyond our morning walks to school arranged by our parents. Her family had moved into a nearby condo Village by the Grange and purchased a two-bedroom unit across from the building's rec center and gym where we'd play table tennis and pool. Elodie would shout to her mom, "nou pe ale gym" as she threatened to school me in ping pong; I'd remind her of my winning record at pool. We played sports together—egging each other on.

My mother had rented a unit at The Grange for a few years while divorcing my father. Our family later moved into a government subsidized co-op around the same time Elodie's family moved into The Grange. Years later, Elodie confided, "I used to imagine making one of those telephone cups with a string that could connect our apartments together. I was sad when you guys moved out." I was sad too, but not the way Elodie was. What I longed for was Elodie's household. Hélène and Eddy were always around, preparing feasts and chatting about the latest TV shows. Unlike my family, they had cable. For fun, Eddy would often practice saying "hello" and "thank you" in new languages he had just learned. They did everything together: went on trips, ate out, joined community parties, went to church on Sundays and ate brunch afterward. Quite a contrast with my family. When my mother wasn't working multiple jobs to make ends meet, she was canvassing for some rights group or political action against Mike Harris—Ontario's long reigning

conservative Premier. Moving further away from our school and into government-supported housing made me yearn for Elodie's more "normal" childhood.

I also viewed Elodie's Catholicism with envy. Not only did she have a European name, she attended church—a more "Canadian" experience than our family's rare attendance at a Buddhist temple. Elodie and her younger sister, Kimmy, used to play a game in front of me that mimicked a Catholic service. "Kimmy. The body of Christ," Elodie would say, holding the circular haw flake—a millimeter-thick dark pink sweet made from the Chinese hawthorne fruit—resembling the Eucharist. After Elodie would place the haw flake in Kimmy's mouth, Kimmy would draw the sign of the cross on her body and say "amen." They would switch off as the priest and the communicant. They didn't share the fun with me. To take the body of Christ you had to have been taught the precise ritual by a nun and had to have had your first communion to receive the Eucharist. You had to be Catholic—which I was not.

By high school, Elodie (ninth grade) and I (tenth) started taking sports—and especially indoor volleyball—more seriously. Our high school—Harbord Collegiate Institute—had one of the strongest girls' volleyball programs in the inner city, and Elodie and I thrived on the more sophisticated coaching. For Elodie, volleyball was becoming a passion. She loved the structure, the comradery, the competition. Sport was no longer an escape from the hostilities of her peers; it was where she could challenge herself to perfect skills and be known as more than an immigrant. For me, sport was a coping mechanism: a distraction from a troubled home life and an incentive to remain in high school. The gymnasium was the one place where I felt some sense of control and competence. While my motives and Elodie's differed, volleyball became our driving passion. Eventually, we

ventured into the world of junior club volleyball in Ontario together, spending hours on the bus and subway going to and from practice, gossiping and practicing our conversational French.

In the eleventh grade, I played on Harbord's senior girls' volleyball team while Elodie remained on the junior team. It had nothing to do with skill. I was just a year older. No one else on the junior team had made the senior team but me. The senior team was already stacked with graduating players who had been playing and winning together since grade nine. At the time, the two years between me and rest of my teammates seemed like decades. Most of them had a driver's license, could vote, and could drink. They were cool, strong, athletic, and Asian—a combination I never saw on TV or read in books. For the first time, I had role models who kind of looked like me. They seemed much more mature than my ex-teammates on the junior team. Their uniform was more adult too. They all wore spandex tights like the older club girls and university players. I felt embarrassed but had to ask one of them how they dealt with panty lines and how they played during their period with the tights. She told me "thongs and tampons." I had only worn either a few times at that point. I played it cool and attempted to at least look the part with the uniform. Then Coach Murray put me on the starting line up every game. He wanted to prepare one of his only non-graduating players for the senior league for following years. I felt like an impostor. A few of my new teammates helped make me feel that way too. I took the challenge in stride, though at times in tears.

The junior and senior team competitions often took place on the same day and location, and the two teams sometimes shared practice space. Whenever I looked over at Elodie on the junior team, I felt like she should be in my place. She had more skills to justify

a starting spot on the senior team, and wouldn't have felt the need, as I did, to compensate with spandex tights to feel a part of the team. Elodie always seemed one step ahead of the game. While I would make diving saves for the ball, she would already be in the right spot, waiting for the play to come to her. Elodie's athletic confidence and intuition came from within. She didn't fight the ball, she moved with it. She didn't easily get ahead of herself or dwell in past mistakes. She didn't overthink the plays or her performance, whereas I concerned myself with everyone's opinions and too often got in the way of myself. Elodie didn't say much on the court, but teammates could feel her support. I too felt more assured when playing next to Elodie.

Our stint in the Ontario Volleyball Association (OVA) lasted only a few years. I couldn't afford the costs required to play, and Elodie found that it took too much time away from her studies. As our prospects for playing club volleyball dwindled, a school-league referee recruited Elodie and me to try out for a downtown club in a Chinese volleyball organization that we'd never heard of. Curious, we attended a series of practices at Riverdale High School—one of Harbord's rival schools for volleyball. There, we saw other Chinese, Asian, and mixed Asian players from schools we'd competed against. Some of them also played in the OVA. With each practice, we learned snippets of the Chinese league's history and rules. Between practices and scrimmages, older club members lamented anti-Chinese racism and preached about how our race values hard work. Hard work, they claimed, paid off both in sport and in life. These messages were like gospel, and our youth made us vulnerable followers.

I was sixteen years old and Elodie fifteen when we went on our first unsupervised road trip out of the country. This was the era before helicopter parenting, but even so, we were stunned that Elodie's parents and my mother allowed us to go to New York City for a Chinese volleyball tournament. We sardined into a hotel room with six other teammates to cut hotel costs. Each of us claimed a corner or drawer for our stuff then started pulling the mattresses off the bed, while someone rang down to the front for extra sheets, blankets, and towels. We called dibs on who got to shower first in the morning and after games. It was a weekend-long slumber party with scheduled volleyball matches, Chinese banquet receptions, and outlet mall shopping.

Early in the morning an assortment of baos waited for us when we got to Seward Park along Essex Street and East Broadway. The blue pop-up tents protected us from the July sun and staked our claim to the club's corner of the venue. Tournament organizers hoisted up bright blue, pink, and white volleyball nets held by wooden poles and anchored with thick rope attached to barrels. The usual patrons and homeless residents of the park were pushed to the perimeter. Despite the excitement, we hated playing on the pavement in the sun and against the wind. The shards of broken glass on the sidelines distracted us, made us play like beginners again. "Ghetto volleyball," we called it. But by the final day of the tournament we were all bragging about whose cement burn looked worse. "Sunburn or New York dirt?" we boasted as we folded down our sweat-soaked kneepads, revealing the pale skin underneath.

During a Connex practice a few years later coach Li Bo took Elodie to the side for extra conditioning and drills. A few of us served to her so she could get in a few more

"touches" as she prepared for the Ontario junior provincial team tryouts. Li Bo, then the assistant coach for the University of Toronto women's volleyball team, had a good feeling about Elodie's chances. We all did. At seventeen, Elodie dominated the Toronto school league. The Toronto Star had already featured her in the high school sports section, and she was a solid competitor in the Chinese league. On Connex, she played for the A team while the rest of us—still in high school played—on the B team, with our sights set on moving up. In the club, Elodie was not only better, she was Chinese, and that meant there were no restrictions on her playing time. The league required that two-thirds of the players on the court be full Chinese, which I was not. Nor were half of the Connex B team players. Sometimes Elodie and I would joke that we were playing "racist volleyball," but we always found some justification in it. I was a little less ambivalent about the rules because I constantly competed with Nicole, who is half Chinese, for an outside hitter spot on the starting lineup. When I didn't start, the league somehow felt a little more racist. Even so, I happily served at Elodie in the hope that she would make the provincial team. A handful of us played in the OVA and knew how white the league was. For an Asian to make a regional or provincial team, she had to be undeniably better than the white players. Elodie was that player, and we pinned our hopes on her.

But for the first time, Elodie did not make the cut. We all murmured amongst ourselves about how unfair it was. Elodie said nothing. Nothing about the rejection she felt, letting down herself and others, or how she questioned her athletic abilities. Club Volleyball in Ontario was notoriously political. Elodie was overlooked and it somehow felt racial. If she couldn't make it, what hopes did any of us have in playing at higher levels?

Elodie carried this burden for two years. The fear of rejection almost prevented her from trying out for the University of Toronto team.

When Elodie walked on to the University of Toronto's Varsity Blues gym for tryouts, she was surrounded by the players we'd admired as high schoolers. She told me how it felt surreal at the first official practice when her new teammates were sorting out jersey numbers. Before the team's opening match, everyone in the gymnasium stood to face the Canadian flag, the national anthem in the background. In a blue jersey, Elodie stood along her new teammates while everyone else wore white. She had not only made the University of Toronto's women's volleyball team; she was starting as the rookie libero. "You know I wasn't going to try out, but you pushed me to," Elodie would say whenever we talked about her rookie year. I never knew if she was trying to give me partial credit for making the team or if she was trying to console me for not making it myself.

I had tried for two years and made it to the last cut each time. Both years I was devastated but knew it was fair. The other girls were bigger, stronger, and more experienced. In the coach's words, I was a smart, skilled player, but "you can't teach height!" She put me on an OVA team with other last cut players and sometimes we would scrimmage with the varsity team. Eventually, I moved onto a varsity sport that depended more on speed and agility than height—squash. Our team went on to win two Ontario University Athletics championships, but I still missed practicing and winning with Elodie. At least she and I still had our summer Chinese league. When our practice and competition schedules aligned, we would study and cross train together. Even so, we saw less of each other. Our athletic paths were diverging.

Had it been anyone other than Elodie in that starting rookie libero spot, I would have seethed with resentment. Instead, I was her biggest fan. When I watched her step onto the court for the first time as a Blues volleyball athlete, my palms were sweaty and legs shaking. Don't shank your first pass. Don't shank your first pass. 'C'mon Elodie, you've got this. A bunch of the other Connex girls were there cheering alongside Elodie's family. Our former high school coaches and teammates were there too. We all wanted Elodie to succeed—for her, and for the parts of ourselves we saw in her. It was easy to root for #5. She had the skills and quiet confidence that we admired. Her talent spoke for her. It was simple.

Ogden Public School group photo, 1991. Elodie's grade four year.
(Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Elodie wearing the sweater in which she was teased. With younger sister Kimmy.
(Photo courtesy of Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Toronto high school junior girls' volleyball champions, 1997. Elodie, as captain of the team (center to the left of the trophy). (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Duplicate of the photograph that appeared in the *Toronto Star* newspaper, sports section for Elodie's athlete of the week recognition, February 27, 1997.
(Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

CHAPTER 1

The Intimacies of "Home"

Donne to la main, prend mo la main	Give me your hand, take my hand
La main dans la main monwar	Hand in hand my friend
Anou batir	Let's build
Anou batir	Let's build
Nation Mauricien	Mauritian nation
Ki to Hindou	Whether you are Hindu
Ki to musulman	Whether you are Muslim
Ki to sinois	Whether you are Chinese
Ki to enn cretien	Whether you are Christian
Ki to créole	Whether you are Créole (black)
Ki to enn blanc	Whether you are white
Tous c ki finn né dans sa pay la	All who were born in this country
Pé bisin marsé la main dans la main	Need to walk hand in hand[1]

—Les Gowry Brothers, *Anou Batir Nation Mauricien*[2]

Within immigrant narratives, "home" often represents a geographical point of origin and nostalgic site of return. Home is frequently discussed in terms of binaries: old/new, there/here, origin/settlement, or traditional/modern. By contrast, the complex migratory history of Elodie and her ancestors in Mauritius disrupts linear narratives of home that attach people, languages, and cultures to a single geography. Her family's testimony of multiple migrations from the late nineteenth through the twentieth century links Elodie's ancestors in Africa to the racialized labor system that followed the abolition of slavery in Mauritius in the mid 1800s. Postcolonial scholars have drawn attention to the enduring legacies of colonialism, historical trauma, and forced migration, complicating the meanings of home and homeland and resisting essentialized constructions of diasporic subjects.[3] The diasporic trajectory of Elodie's family provides an

[1] Elodie translated this song in consultation with Mauritian friends and family.
[2] Les Gowry Brothers, *Anou Batir Nation Mauricien* (Mauritius: 1968). This is the first verse of the song in Mauritian Créole. It came out during the time of Mauritius' independence in 1968 as a kind of unifying anthem.
[3] Rishma Dunlop, "Memoirs of a Sirdar's Daughter in Canada: Hybridity and Writing Home," in Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity*, 115-50.

intimate perspective on these broad global processes in ways that shed light on how identities are borne of transnational connections and colonial ruptures. It also extends our understanding of African diasporic subjects to include people of Chinese ethnicity.

For Elodie and her family, home and belonging referred less to a fixed place than to a protracted tradition of migration and an ongoing process of creolization. Elodie's parents—Hélène and Eddy—associated their migratory identities with their Hakka Chinese ancestry and thus with a centuries-long history of displacement. This identification with migration rather than static geography challenges familiar notions of home. Elodie, in particular, embraced this identity as part of a unique hybridized Hakka group with colonial ties connecting multiple ex-plantation geographies. For her parents, the rationale and strategies for settlement in Canada derived in part from what they believed to be their Hakka penchant for constant migration.

The diasporic experience of Elodie's family is inseparable from a historical trajectory spanning slavery to indenture, colony to nation-state, and colonial subjects to independent citizens, in which cultural change was intimately related to political and familial transformation. American Studies scholar Lisa Lowe investigates these global processes and colonial links from which modern subjects emerge, and insists on those subjects' "value" and legibility when otherwise forgotten.[4] Although Lowe's work supports the broader argument of this chapter, which asserts the interconnectedness of Africa, Asia, Europe, and the New World through a globalized labor history, her work highlights particular regions within the British empire, and mentions Mauritius only fleetingly. This chapter, by contrast, positions Africa and the Chinese diaspora at the center of these continental connections, focusing on Elodie's ancestral ties to Mauritius. My analysis thus begins with the subjects previously relegated to the historiographical

[4] Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents,* 18.

periphery. As such, I provide an intimate account of Chinese Mauritian history manifested in the life of a contemporary subject in Canada.

Elodie traced her family's history in Mauritius to the 1800s when her great-great paternal grandparents lived in Port Louis during an era of indentured labor shortly after the abolition of slavery in the British empire. Colonizers attempted to indenture Chinese laborers in French then British Mauritius on five occasions throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with mixed results, altering the labor and identities of Chinese in this plantation colony. Both Eddy's and Hélène's ancestors occupied shopkeeper spaces servicing both plantation workers and the general public. Neither identified as descendants of indentured servants, which distinguished them from the vast majority of Mauritians with diasporic identities rooted in histories of indenture. Free migrants from China continued to arrive in Mauritius into the first half of the twentieth century. Elodie's paternal grandfather and maternal grandparents arrived in Mauritius during this time using strategies such as arranged marriage, adoption, and fictive papers to subvert immigration restrictions. Hélène and Eddy recalled traumatic details about China that warranted their ancestors' migration to Mauritius who sought refuge. For both Elodie's parents, the act of retaining and reconstructing these family histories was part of their diasporic journey.

Eddy and Hélène came of age in the wake of Mauritian independence from British rule in 1968, as the newly-liberated country embarked on various nation-building projects. Among the ways to build a nation, culture served as an important mechanism for defining national identities and boundaries. The multiple ethnicities in Mauritius served as a focal point for the cultural events designed to forge post-independence harmony. Independence Day celebrations foregrounded the newly liberated country's multiethnic makeup in songs, publications, and parades. While Hélène and Eddy were too young to vote for or against independence, they

remembered and participated in Independence Day celebrations. In addition to domestic modes of cultural construction, Mauritius also sought membership in global communities. In the years following independence, Mauritius and other newly formed African states petitioned to participate in various internationally recognized competitions. Events such as the Olympics provided a site in which to perform nationalism while reaffirming or garnering recognition as independent states. The elites of the country also leveraged their diasporic ties with Asia to construct the country as an economic bridge for business between Africa and Asia. During this era, the socioeconomic status of Chinese Mauritians rose, and they increasingly occupied professional spaces or emigrated for education and jobs.

Significantly, the decades in which the new nation sought to establish its independence within the global community also spawned a second migration. During this time, Eddy and Hélène moved with their children to Canada.[5] The family's identification as migrants—from China to Mauritius in the nineteenth century, and from Mauritius to Canada in the late-twentieth—illustrates how cultural identity evolves through an ongoing diasporic experience. Furthermore, their emigration from a country that claims its entire population as diasporic challenges notions of "home" as a fixed geography. If migration profoundly shaped the family's identity and sense of cohesion, so too did its evolving spirituality. In Mauritius, Eddy and Hélène were born into Catholicism, though their parents' generation practiced a hybrid form of Buddhism and Catholicism. During their early years in Canada, Elodie and her family shed their Catholic identities and converted to evangelical Christianity. Adopting evangelical Protestantism helped to root the family within a sub-group of the predominantly Cantonese-speaking community where they now reside. The changes in how the family practiced Christianity

[5] The family briefly visited Eddy's younger sister Mary in London, England prior to arriving in Toronto.

illustrate the heterogeneous and dynamic convergence of religious, cultural, generational, and migratory identities. Paul Gilroy's notion of "ethnic absolutism," which warns against reductive and fixed parameters of ethnic and national difference, helps us reconsider the way that constructions of nation, race, and ethnicity work through people in diaspora.[6] The testimony of Elodie and her family challenges familiar ideas of migration and "home" by drawing our attention to the complex cultural processes through which diasporic histories unfold and nations are forged in colonial and postcolonial contexts.[7]

Forming Colonial Subjects

The historiography of Mauritius begins with European colonization. Historians of Mauritius insist on the absence of indigenous inhabitants at the time of its "discovery," resulting in a scholarly discussion of the country's racial formation premised entirely on migration to "uninhabited lands."[8] Some scholars of Mauritius who use the term "indigenous" do so in reference to subaltern communities—including black Africans and Créoles who identify as descendants of African and Malagasy slaves—that make claims to the land through culture, traditions, history, folklore, legends, oral histories, and genealogical ties to slavery.[9] Most scholars avoid linking Créoles with indigeneity, instead centering Créole identities in a critical discussion of racial formation of the islands, entrenched in the legacy of slavery.

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[6] Paul Gilroy, "Nationalism, History, and Ethnic Absolutism," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 30 (Autumn 1990): 115.

[7] Ann Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post)Colonial Studies," *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (December 2001): 864.

[8] I read no evidence that Mauritius was occupied prior to European contact. This kind of narrative echoes the trope of the discovery of the New World, which has long served to conceal the violent processes of colonization. In recent decades, historians of the Americas critical of this narrative have produced a substantial body of scholarship that foregrounds the presence of sophisticated indigenous societies prior to colonization. By indigenous, I mean original inhabitants of a land with a preexisting relationship with the place.

[9] This is evident in Roukaya Kasenally's discussion of the privileged few whose wishes have come at the rights and liberties of what Kasenally called "indigenous Mauritians." See Kasenally, "Mauritius: Paradise Reconsidered," *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 2 (2011): 161. It is also evident in Karel A. Bakker and Francois Odendaal, "Managing Heritage in a Contested Space: The Case of Le Morne Cultural Landscape in Mauritius," *South African Journal of Art History* 23, no. 1 (2008): 229.

A long history of successive colonial occupations preceded the establishment of the independent nation of Mauritius in 1968. In brief, colonial claims to the region began in 1507 when the Portuguese temporarily established a base there. In 1598, A Dutch fleet blown off course arrived at the island. A Dutch settlement emerged forty years later, christened "Mauritius" in honor of Dutch Prince Maurice of Nassau.[10] The Dutch also established the first sugar plantations on the islands and were responsible for the extinction of the country's national fauna, the dodo bird,[11] before abandoning the colony in 1710. From 1715 to 1810 the French occupied the islands, which were then called *Isle de France*. Although the French lost formal political control to the British during the Napoleonic Wars, French culture, sugar planters, and landowners continued to thrive at the top of the socioeconomic hierarchy in British Mauritius.[12] In 1807, Britain banned the slave trade in the Atlantic, and by 1811, in the Indian Ocean as well.[13] In 1834 the British abolished slavery but implemented indentured labor.[14]

While the historiography of the country bears no mention of an existing indigenous group, historical scholarship on Mauritius does not replicate conventional colonial narratives that obscure the violence and impact of slavery. Rather, the founding myth of the nation is rooted in its rise out of slavery and into freedom. Indeed, the country's national identity as a multiethnic and multicultural nation rests entirely on its history as a colonial outpost with roots in the

[10] Kasenally, 161.
[11] "History," Republic of Mauritius (website), accessed February 11, 2017, http://www.govmu.org/English/ExploreMauritius/Pages/History.aspx.
[12] Kasenally, "Mauritius," 161; and Sue Peabody, *Madeline's Children: Family, Freedom, Secrets in France's Indian Ocean Colonies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 136.
[13] Peabody, 140.
[14] "An Overview of History of Indenture," Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (website), accessed April 15, 2017, http://www.aapravasighat.org/English/Resources%20Research/Documents/History%20of%20Indenture.pdf.

transnational slave trade. In so doing, these scholars shift the focus on the slave trade from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.[15]

The racialized history of labor in Mauritius thus sheds light not only on the history of slavery but also on the lesser known history of Asian indentured laborers who served as an intermediary race between slavery and emancipation. Indentured labor arose to fill the need for labor after the abolition of the slave trade by Britain in 1807.[16] The British introduced indentured labor to the colony of Mauritius, bringing a large number of migrants from Africa, China, India, and Southeast Asia to work in the plantations. Designed as the "Great Experiment," indenture in Mauritius was intended to initially test the profitability of "free" labor over the slave system.[17] The "experiment" ran from the 1820 to 1838, when Britain abolished slavery in its colonies.[18] Based on the initial success of indentured labor, the British implemented it in other colonies, and the French and Dutch followed suit. In recent years, scholars have identified the collisions and overlaps between Asian migrants and former slaves in colonized zones, emphasizing continuities as well as ruptures in the global system that produced a racialized labor force. For instance, Vijay Prashad asserts that the end of chattel slavery produced the need for substantial supply of manual laborers. Colonial outposts turned to British India and China to supply the thousands needed to

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[15] Krish Seetah, "Contextualizing Complex Social Contact: Mauritius, a Microcosm of Global Diaspora," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 26, no. 2 (2015): 266; Peabody, *Madeline's Children*; and Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), xiii. Vergès focuses on Réunion's on-going colonial relationship with France through the ideology of family romance, the colony's perpetual "debt" the metropole, and France's anxiety over the island's *métissage*. While the post-colonial trajectory of Mauritius was different than that of Réunion—due in part to the distribution of colonies between Britain and France after the Napoleonic War—Vergès's work centers the slave trade in the Indian Ocean and insists on specificity of experiences in that region.

[16] Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, "History of Indenture," 3; Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents;* 31; Prashad, *Myth of Cultural Purity,* 71. A burgeoning scholarship on Asians in colonial outposts focuses largely on the Caribbean. The Chinese from the Caribbean—Jamaica, Cuba, British Guiana, and Trinidad—have formed unique cultural communities in North American and European geographies.

[17] Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, "History of Indenture," 9. Mauritius was uniquely positioned for the "Great Experiment" with close access to several likely labor sources.

[18] The British freed their slaves in 1834, but kept them indentured in an apprentice program, though later freed them from the program in 1838. Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, 7.

do "coolie work."[19] Lisa Lowe has also examined this transitional period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, asserting that Chinese laborers occupied an intermediary position—one that replaced and obscured the labor that slaves had previously performed.[20]

Colonizers introduced Asians into the slave plantation economy in a way that differentiated Asian labor and their social status from both the black slaves and white planters.[21] According to Claire Jean Kim, from the mid-1800s the dominant white group valorized Asians in the New World relative to the subordinate group (blacks) on the basis of presumed "racial" or "cultural" difference as a means to control both groups. In this process of racial triangulation, the hegemonic group constructed Asians as immutably foreign, ostracizing them from civic engagement.[22] The history of Mauritius, by contrast—a colony in the Indian Ocean—complicates these theories of Asians as an intermediary race both because the geography has no known indigenous group, and because Asians (particularly Hindu Indians) rose to dominate governmental spaces in the post-independence era.

The history of Chinese indenture in Mauritius differs not only from the history of indenture in other colonies; it also differs from the experience of other indentured groups in Mauritius itself. Throughout the British empire, colonizers considered the Chinese a difficult group to subject to indenture, as many did not take to plantation labor. In Mauritius, too, colonizers had struggled to indenture Chinese subjects. Unlike in Cuba where the treatment of Chinese was among the harshest across the colonies, in Mauritius the British systematically increased the quota of Asian women allowed to immigrate starting in 1856, thus raising morale

[19] Prashad, *Myth of Cultural Purity,* 71.
[20] Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents,* 24.
[21] Lowe, 31.
[22] Claire Jean Kim, "Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 107.

and encouraging family life.[23] The Chinese in Mauritius were never indentured in the same capacity or volume as subjects from India. Nonetheless, from 1760 through 1920, first the French and then the British attempted on five different occasions to indenture Chinese agricultural laborers in the Mauritian colony—with mixed results.[24] The repeated attempts to recruit migrants from China for indenture followed the British Indian government's intermittent suspension of the *coolie trade* to Mauritius. Despite the long-term failure of these attempts to indenture Chinese migrants, many Chinese migrants remained in the colony and integrated into the community as peddlers, artisans, and even the occasional small planter.[25]

Eddy and Hélène's insistence that Chinese did not work in the plantations is thus compatible with this longer history of Chinese resistance to indenture.[26] Even during the era of indenture, not all Chinese embarked in Mauritius as indentured servants. As early as the 1740s, the Chinese were present in *Isle de France.* By the 1780s, Chinese migrants had steadily and voluntarily voyaged to the shores of Port Louis in order to find employment in various trades or to work as merchants.[27] This history of failed Chinese indenture in Mauritius constructs a narrative that distinguishes the Chinese diaspora from other diasporas that produced the majority of the country's population. While most Mauritian residents today identify as descendants of

[23] H. Ly Tio Fane-Pineo and Edouard Lim Fat, *From Alien to Citizen: The Integration of the Chinese in Mauritius* (Mauritius: Editions de l'océan Indien, 2008), 158. In Cuba, Chinese indentured laborers toiled alongside African slaves even prior to emancipation.
[24] Ly Tio Fane-Pineo and Lim Fat, 150-165. Dates when colonial Mauritius attempted to recruit Chinese indentured laborers: 1760, 1829, 1841-1843, 1857, 1920.
[25] *Chinatown in the Heart of Mauritius* (Port Louis, Mauritius: Éditions Vizavi, 2016), 19.
[26] During my interview with Noel Siao, the president of a Mauritian organization in Toronto called Club M, he insisted that Chinese in Mauritius were never indentured. For him, this seemed to be a point of pride during our conversation. Noel is also a co-organizer of Toronto's annual Hakka festival. Noel Siao, in conversation with the author, July 7, 2017.
[27] Lynn Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: A History of the Chinese Diaspora* (New York: Kodansha International, 2004), 29.

indentured servitude or slavery, neither Eddy nor Hélène identify as descendants of indentured subjects.[28]

This lesser-known transnational history of racialized labor from African slaves to Asian indentured migrant workers in the Indian Ocean shaped the diasporic trajectory of Elodie's family. Elodie's earliest ancestor arrived at Mauritius during the nineteenth century.[29] Her paternal great-great-grandfather, Akem Ah Cham, and great-great-grandmother, Ah Kee Marie Clémencia, married in Mauritius sometime during the 1800s, and had their five children on the island; the last was born in 1897. The testimony of Elodie's family connects historical scholarship on global trade to the personal impact of the post-emancipation period on Chinese laborers and their descendants. For instance, the names of Elodie's ancestors—arguably one of the most intimate parts of one's identity—illustrate the deeply personal imprint of colonialism at the time of the family's arrival in Mauritius. Elodie's paternal ancestral tree has three notable features: 1. The tree starts with Ah Cham and Ah Kee (Marie Clémencia) Li Shen Shan, Elodie's first known ancestors in Mauritius (Figure 1.1); 2. The given names of individuals on this family tree are overwhelmingly French: Josèphe, Edouard, Solange, Georgette, Cécile, Jean Michel, Guy, Lise, Marcel, André, Antoine, and so forth (Figure 1.2); and 3. Most of the family names are two or three separated syllables: Lew Chuk Wai, Lim Fong Sim, Chung To, etc. (Figure 1.2). The multisyllabic surnames are relics of a colonial error in Mauritius and other former island colonies, as Chinese last names are traditionally one syllable: Wong, Leung, Chung, Shen, Ma, Chan etc. As Elodie explained:

[28] Hélène Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, February 19, 2017.
[29] Koon Yin Florence Lew Hing Geng, one of Eddy Li Yuk Lo's cousins, embarked on a genealogy project that traced Eddy's first maternal ancestors in Mauritius. Eddy graciously shared a copy of this project—a binder filled with family trees, dates, names, and photos.

> [M]y ancestors landed in Mauritius, and when you ask a Chinese person their name, they give you their last name first. So, like Li, and then Yuk Lo would be the generational name and then the actual given name. They thought that was the whole family name. The immigration officers would then give them a French name or an English name. So, their whole name stayed as a family name. That's how it became three syllables.[30]

She further clarified that the "Yuk" in her last name, Li Yuk Lo, signified the generation and gender of an individual of a family, while "Lo" is the given name. Thus, for Antoine Li Yuk Lo (Elodie's paternal grandfather) "Yuk Lo" were his given names and "Li," his last name. However, upon his immigration to Mauritius in the mid-twentieth century, his entire name was taken for his surname. Consequently, Elodie's full name—*Nioun Chin Elodie Li Yuk Lo*—bears her grandfather's entire name, her given French name, "Elodie," her given Chinese name, "Nioun," and her generational and gender indicator, "Chin."

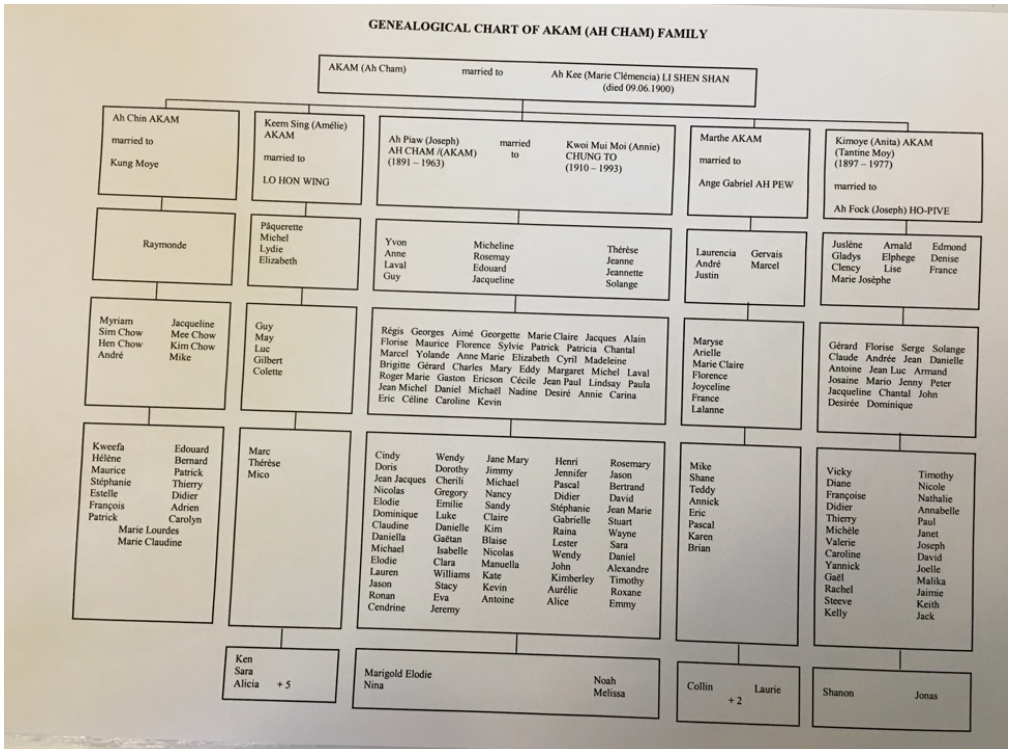

Figure 1.1 Elodie Li Yuk Lo's great-great-grandparents family tree on her paternal side. (Courtesy Eddy Li Yuk Lo.)

[30] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, October 25, 2017.

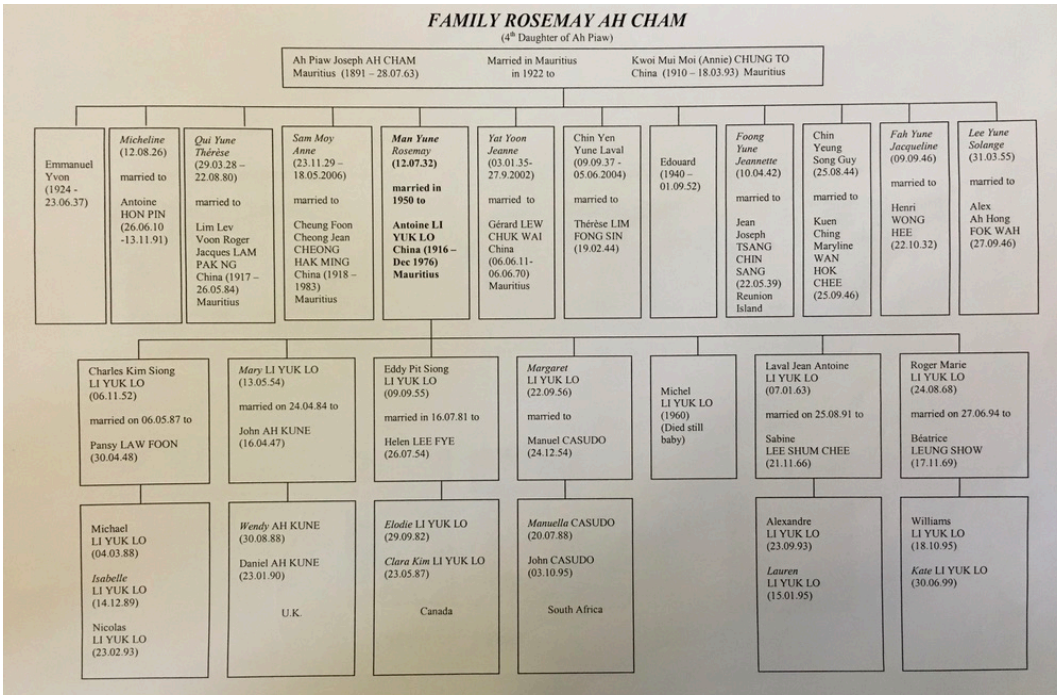

Figure 1.2 Rosemay Ah Cham's family tree (Elodie's paternal grandmother). (Courtesy Eddy Li Yuk Lo.)

In spite this colonial error, Elodie embraced her surname. In so doing, remnants of her Chinese heritage converged with her diasporic Mauritian identity in a nuanced conception of home. For instance, when Elodie met other Chinese people in diaspora with two- or three-syllable last names—both in Canada and during her travels—she immediately inquired if they were also Hakka from Jamaica, Trinidad, Mauritius, or another colonial island. For Elodie, multi-syllabic surnames gave her an identity.[31] She rooted her Chinese diasporic identity to a unique migrant community tied to former plantation colonies, and to Hakka Chinese with histories of multiple migrations, rather than direct ties to China. In her formulation, China was an assumed "homeland" but not one that she was connected to. Traces of this distanced "origin"

[31] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2017.

persisted in Elodie's name, to which she attached her unique diasporic identity—and that included both China and Mauritius.

Central to Elodie and her parents' identity was their identification with the Hakka Chinese who made up the third wave of Chinese migrants to Mauritius. By the late nineteenth century their ethnic group equaled the Cantonese and Fujianese combined.[32] Hakka Chinese are a distinct migratory group with a history of continual displacement within China; indeed, "Hakka," meaning "guest people" are sometimes referred to as the "Jews of Asia."[33] Although most scholars consider the Hakka people a subgroup of the dominant Han ethnic group of China, some argue that Hakka people are their own ethnic group with a unique culture and ties to Central Asia with migratory origins.[34] The Hakka people endured oppression and the inability to gain access to land, and experienced several periods of mass migration over centuries. All of these factors led them to settle in mountainous areas, predominantly in the south of China. Their ethnic identity took shape in the mid-nineteenth century following the Hakka-Cantonese wars and the Taiping Rebellion. Both of these events increased Hakka ethnic awareness and, by extension, Hakka ethnic marginalization, displacement, and emigration in response to Cantonese aggression.[35] This tension between Cantonese and Hakka descendants persisted among Chinese migrants in Mauritius.[36] Elodie recalled that when she was a young girl, her family members warned her against marrying a Cantonese Chinese man. Additionally, the Cantonese language

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[32] *Chinatown in the Heart of Mauritius*, 95. The Fujianese Chinese were the first wave of Chinese migrants to Mauritius followed by the Cantonese Chinese, and then Hakka Chinese.
[33] "Historical Background," The Hakka People (website), accessed February 21, 2017, http://edu.ocac.gov.tw/lang/hakka/english/a/a.htm. This is a Taiwan government website. Most of it is written in Chinese characters. Pan asserts that Hakka Chinese have been called "guest families" and "Gypsies of Asia." See Pan, *Chinese Diaspora*, 16.
[34] Eriberto P. Lozada, "Hakka Diaspora," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World,* ed. Melvin Ember, Carol Ember, and Ian A. Skoggard (New York: Klewer Academic / Plenum, 2004), 94.
[35] Lozada, 94.
[36] Pan, *Chinese Diaspora,* 61.

represented a source of alienation for Elodie who grew up in a predominantly Cantonese-speaking Chinese diasporic community in Toronto.

Although the Chinese arrived at Mauritius alongside Indian migrants—sometimes on the same vessel—they performed different types of labor. Throughout the decades prior to independence, the Chinese in Mauritius occupied commercial spaces, primarily as shopkeepers. *Laboutik Sinoi* (Mauritian Créole for Chinese shop) fulfilled demands for basic commodities in cities, the countryside, and on sugar plantations.[37] According to Eddy, the first three generations of men in his family—all born prior to Mauritius' independence—worked as shopkeepers who serviced Indian, Black, and Créole plantation laborers, as well as the general community.[38] In a conversation with Eddy, he recalled his father's work:

> So, there were lots of plantations around the shop. The laborers had to get up early to go work on the plantation, right? So, at five o'clock they would knock on the door. They would ask for a cigarette, or they wanted to buy bread, so you had to get up early. [B]ut the regular hours were from seven to seven. But because they had to go work early they would knock on the door. So, my dad had to get up just to sell maybe one cigarette [laugh].[39]

Despite the racially segregated nature of labor in Mauritius, Eddy's reflection highlights the daily interactions and geographic proximity of these plantation workers. In fact, Chinese shopkeepers, such as Eddy's father, were part of a legacy that revolutionized commerce in Mauritius by making available food, clothes, and basic necessities to plantation workers and non-elites who otherwise had no access to these good. These shopkeepers also instituted the credit system and allowed for barter to accommodate their patrons' plantation salaries.[40] Eddy's comment about his father who had to "get up to just sell maybe one cigarette" illustrates the livelihood of the

[37] *Chinatown in the Heart of Mauritius*, 60.
[38] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, March 26, 2017.
[39] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, February 19, 2017.
[40] *Chinatown in the Heart of Mauritius,* 24.

Chinese as inseparable from that of the plantation workers. I asked Eddy and Hélène if they remembered any Chinese people who worked on plantations. The answer was a resounding no. Although Chinese migrants came to Mauritius under colonial circumstances similar to those faced by the Indian indentured workers, there was a clear segmentation of the labor market. This in turn shaped the community's divergent political affiliations and positions on independence.

Remembering Difficult Pasts

The testimony of Hélène's parents' journey to Mauritius speaks directly to the global traumas that cause displacement as well as the trauma of migration itself. Hélène's parents migrated to Mauritius in the post-World War I era. Like Eddy's family, Hélène's maiden name—Lee Fye—bears the multisyllabic surname indicative of her father's transformation into a colonial subject. She recalled that her father did not have a passport, although he had some sort of travel card for his passage on the ship. Until 1944, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (CCC) in Mauritius (established in 1908) provided consulate services for the Sino-Mauritian community, which included issuing arrival certificates, visas, and passports. In 1923, Hélène's paternal grandparents and father (who was an infant at the time) arrived in Mauritius where they were processed by the CCC.[41] (See Figure 1.3 of the immigration photo of Hélène's father that also included Hélène's grandparents.) Hélène did not recall the specific conditions in which her father arrived in Mauritius; however, she retained the history of her mother's arrival:

> Hélène: Both my parents, the one I lived with, they came from China. My father was born in China, he was brought to Mauritius…It's very confusing, I'm not sure. But my mom came when she was sixteen, I think. [42]
>
> Elodie:…But she was younger.

[41] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Hélène Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, June 19, 2017.
[42] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 19, 2017. In this anecdote, Hélène is discussing her biological father's arrival, and her adoptive mother's arrival to Mauritius. In the following page, I discuss Hélène's adoption.

> Hélène: She was younger she said. She almost didn't make it because she borrowed somebody else's birth certificate. That person was born in Mauritius and wanted to stay in China and went back to China. So, yeah, she almost didn't make it because they thought she looked too young to be that age. But, in the end they let her go. And she was a promise to my dad to be married.

In essence, Hélène's mother arrived in Mauritius as an underage bride for a marriage previously arranged between two families from the same village in China. In an effort to circumvent immigration laws, Hélène's mother—like many others—had migrated to Mauritius using someone else's documents. Hélène's mother (whose real name was Shwee Keaw) used Li Shin Tan's birth certificate, which stated her date of birth as 1926 making Shwee Keaw twenty-three years old at the time of her immigration.[43] Hélène's mother was reluctant to marry the groom who had been chosen for her, but acquiesced to a custom of arranged marriages, which had carried over from China to Mauritius. Hélène's mother lived out the rest of her life as Li Shin Tan.

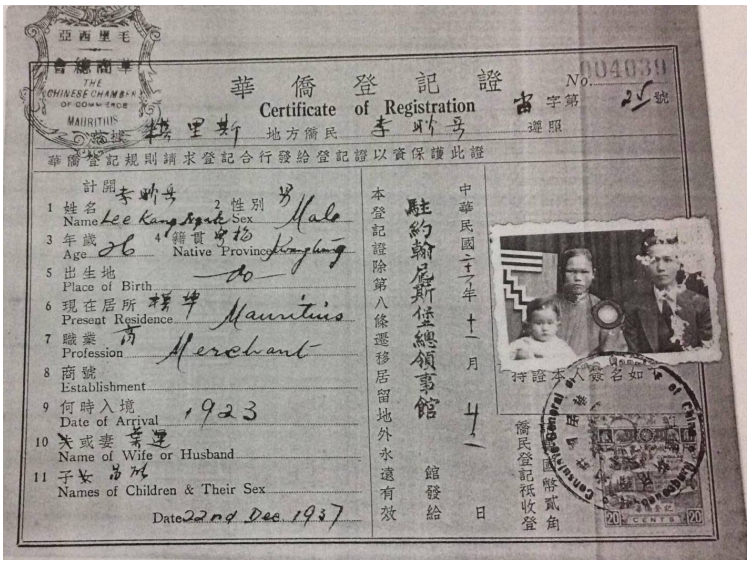

Figure 1.3 Hélène Li Yuk Lo's paternal grandfather's Certificate of Registration upon arrival to Mauritius, processed by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. (Courtesy Hélène Li Yuk Lo.)

[43] Hélène Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, July 7, 2017.

Hélène's story of her mother, in particular, illustrates the ways that Chinese migrants drew on cultural traditions of adoption to reconstruct families in their new geographies. In the quote above, Hélène recounted the story of her adoptive parents—Li Shin Tan and Ying Ngok Lee—referring to them as "the ones I lived with" since she was an infant. The practice of "informal" adoption among Chinese in diaspora ran parallel across other geographies, including the U.S., to circumvent immigration restrictions during the Chinese exclusion era.[44] While Hélène's adoption was not to evade immigration restriction, the fluid and "informal" nature of her adoption mirrored similar strategies of fictive kinship and family formation among Chinese families in diaspora. Hélène remarked that her family's genealogy was "very confusing" since her adoptive and biological fathers were also adopted. Hélène's biological and adoptive fathers were also somehow related and were village neighbors in China. They shared the same generational and gender marker—"Ngok"—in the second part of their given names. In Chinese feudal societies, families commonly adopted sons and sometimes daughters from other families to serve a myriad of purposes. Male heir adoption was a particularly common and protected practice in patriarchal China. This form of adoption was especially flexible, and the adoptee often maintained ties to his biological family and performed familial duties for both sets of parents.[45] Girls were also adopted by (or sold to) families as minor brides or housemaid. While this was far from Hélène's experience of adoption, her grandparents' generation grew up in a China where people frequently reconstructed their families through various forms of adoption: a

[44] Peter S. Li, "Fictive Kinship, Conjugal Tie and Kinship Chain Among Chinese Immigrants in the United States," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 8, no. 1 (1977): 55.
[45] Jiang Yue and He Lixin, *Marriage, Family and Adoption Law,* (Xiamen, China: Xiamen University Press, 2002), 244. As discussed in Yanli Luo, "Rearticulating Immigration: Transnational Adoption from China from 1882 to the Present" (PhD diss., University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2017), 30.

practice that persisted until the mid-twentieth century.[46] Despite the prevalence of fluid family formation among Chinese in diaspora, Hélène's adoption story nonetheless comes punctuated with painful memories that impacted her sense of kinship.

In Mauritius, Hélène was given to her adoptive parents and grew up as the only child. Hélène's adoptive mother had had a stillborn baby around the same time Hélène's biological mother gave birth to Hélène and her twin. Her biological mother had asked her adoptive mother (who was still producing milk) to help nurse one of the twins since the biological mother did not have enough milk for the two of them. The biological parents eventually allowed Hélène's adoptive parents to keep Hélène. Hélène suspected that friends and family pressured her biological parents to allow Hélène's adoptive family to keep her since her biological mother had already given birth to fifteen children, whereas Hélène's adoptive mother had lost the only two she birthed. Since Hélène's adoptive and biological fathers were related, Hélène remained in contact with her biological parents, brothers, and sisters. She frequently interacted with them at family events and gatherings, but her biological mother warned Hélène's brothers and sisters not to mislead Hélène by developing a closeness. In other words, Hélène was distinctly not part of her biological kin's family. Nevertheless, Hélène used her biological family's home address for school registration purposes and maintained her biological family's surname—Lee Fye.[47] It was not until Hélène decided to emigrate to Canada with Eddy and her two children, that she and her adoptive parents filed for official adoption papers. Despite Hélène's complicated family structure, Hélène explained that within the Mauritian Chinese community, there were many forms of adoption and family formations. Simply put, she situated her adoption—entangled with

[46] Luo, 30.
[47] Hélène Li Yuk Lo, conversation, July 7, 2017.

a sense of exclusion and loss—within a broader historical and cultural context, remembering the story of her adoption within her diasporic context.

For both Eddy and Hélène, the act of retaining and reconstructing memories was part of their identity formation in diaspora. Although they both claimed to struggle to recall specific dates and immigration details, their familial history of rupture from the ancestral homeland was in fact passed down through generations. As Vijay Agnew asserts, memory is not merely a collection of facts; rather, the act of remembering is an active process with the potential to make new meanings of a given history.[48] For instance, while Hélène and Eddy pieced together some of their families' migratory histories, Hélène explained that their parents' generation seldom discussed these issues with children. Details about their families' flight from China were not part of regular conversation growing up. She expressed regret over not taking more opportunities to learn about her family's migratory history and conveyed a sense of cultural and familial loss.[49] And yet in those silences Hélène and Eddy reconstructed their families' migratory stories through the details they remembered, recreated with their generational peers, and recounted to their children. In the case of Hélène's biological and adoptive parents and Eddy's father, it appears that their journeys were part of a larger exodus from China in the early to mid-twentieth century. When I asked Eddy and Hélène why they thought their parents left China for Mauritius, they spoke of the dangers of the communist regime and wartime violence:

> Eddy: I usually heard my dad talking about the communist scare. How [the communists] were very bad. That's why they had to leave China. I don't know.[50]
>
> . . .

[48] Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity*, 10.
[49] In her natural concern for others, Hélène worried that she was not providing enough information for my research due to her lack of memory of her ancestors.
[50] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 19, 2017.

Hélène: I heard my mom saying that [my great aunt]…would grab [my mom] and carry her when there were bombings. And they would run and hide in the pipes.

Yuka: Bombings from where?

Hélène: In China.

Yuka: Oh, this is back in China.

Hélène: Yeah.

Elodie: But the great aunt lives in Mauritius now.

Hélène: Yeah, she's in Mauritius now.

Yuka: Do you know what the bombings were from?

Hélène: I heard it was from the Japanese.[51]

The accounts of the difficulties that precipitated emigration from China differed for Eddy's and Hélène's families, though *how* they chose to remember them bore resemblance. While Hélène's adoptive mother immigrated to Mauritius as a bride, she was also part of a larger wave of Chinese migrants fleeing violence in China. For the men who married into Eddy's maternal side of the family, marriage may have presented itself as a pathway to seek *de facto* asylum in Mauritius, as well as social and economic opportunity in a new land. Both Hélène and Eddy picked up on these details through overhearing their parents' accounts. While they spoke with some uncertainty about the accuracy of the account of their parents' migrations, the practice of recounting these details formed a generational identity of the descendants of parents who fled China and settled in Mauritius. They connected their diasporic identities to broader historical trauma and events. Their regard for family histories underscores the centrality of memory in diasporic narratives particularly as it is rendered for reconstructing the homeland and family.[52]

[51] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 19, 2017.
[52] Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity,* 10.

Building a Nation, Forming a Postcolonial Identity

During the post-World War II decades, Mauritius continued to resemble Caribbean planation economies within specific international divisions of labor.[53] Eddy recalled that in these pre-independence decades, when he and Hélène were young, his family—like much of the Chinese community—continued to occupy the "shopkeeper" space that serviced plantation workers and the general public. While the Chinese predominated in the merchant class—a status that connoted wealth and placed them above manual laborers—the true socioeconomic status of Chinese Mauritians varied. Eddy and Hélène both grew up as children of Chinese Mauritian shopkeepers, yet Eddy grew up poor, and Hélène, somewhere between poor and working-class.[54]

Despite Hélène and Eddy's low socioeconomic status, they attended school, which eventually granted them upward mobility and opportunities to branch out of traditional roles as shopkeepers or housewives. Eddy recalled the difficulty of his parents' work, which the next generation often shunned:

> [I]t's so hard…for the parents. To get up early, to get all the stuff ready, the children don't want to take over [the shop] because it's so hard. And the parents try to send [the children] to university or something like that so that [the children] don't have to be the same, like [the parents].[55]

According to Eddy, for some Chinese Mauritian families, owning shops provided comfortable lives, but for many families, including his, shop-keeping was subsistence living. Eddy's parents prioritized education for Eddy and his siblings to the extent that his parents sent the children to live with extended relatives in Port Louis, where educational opportunities were better.[56]

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[53] These colonies supplied agricultural goods to industrialized nations. David Lincoln, "Beyond the Plantation: Mauritius in the Global Division of Labour," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 60.
[54] Eddy and Hélène described their own class status. While Eddy and Hélène considered themselves poor, they did not consider their class position uncommon among the Chinese Mauritian community. They also identified Creoles in Mauritius as the most marginalized group.
[55] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2017.
[56] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2017.

Through better quality education, Eddy and Hélène earned university degrees and acquired social capital through learning and conversing in advanced levels of English and French. Though the official language of British Mauritius was English, the mostly widely used European language was (and continues to be) French.[57] For many Chinese in Mauritius, integration into society rested on learning Créole, English, and French. Eddy explained that prior to 1977, primary schools (grades one through six) were free, whereas high school (grades seven through twelve) were either public or private.[58] Both Hélène and Eddy attended private high schools though Eddy's parents could barely afford the tuition for him and his sibling. To help pay the fees, Eddy and his brothers sold dumplings on the streets. Also, he recalled frequently running away from school administrators who were collecting tuition.[59] Better education meant that both Hélène and Eddy could successfully sit an exam called the Cambridge School Certificate that allowed students to continue their studies. Eddy explained that students could not earn their certificate without passing the English component of the exam. The significance of the English language can be underscored through the enduring debate over whether to institute Créole as the instructional language. Opponents argue that the economic survival of Mauritius depends on its English-speaking (and to some extent French-speaking) work force.[60] Proponents argue that it would create a more equal society since virtually everyone speaks Créole, but many do not speak proficient English or French. Eddy's and Hélène's ability to converse in English and French positioned them advantageously, especially compared to their parents' generation.

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[57] Today well over half of the media outlets are produced in French, though many Mauritians seek to master English. In Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "Linguistic Diversity and the Quest for National Identity: The Case of Mauritius," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13, no. 1 (1990): 4.

[58] According to Eddy, in 1977 the winning party's election platform promised free high school and university education.

[59] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2017. Eddy explained how he and three of his siblings stayed with "popo" (grandmother) and "kung kung" (grandfather) along with several aunts in one apartment.

[60] Eriksen, "Linguistic Diversity," 20.

Educational opportunities were also tied to affiliation with the religion of colonizers, which generated an additional layer of social capital for Elodie's parents. Adopting the Catholic faith granted Chinese youth in Mauritius access to Catholic schools. The Chinese Catholic Mission founded in 1950 played an instrumental role in facilitating Chinese Mauritian conversion to Catholicism. By the early 1980s, two-thirds of Chinese Mauritians were Catholic.[61] Both Hélène and Eddy attended Catholic primary schools. Hélène then attended an Anglican high school. Eddy and his brothers, on the other hand, went to a private Islamic high school near their Port-Louis home that bordered an Indo-Muslim community, but maintained their Catholic faith. Hélène is a first-generation Catholic, as her parents were not baptized. Eddy's mother, by contrast, was born into Catholicism as were Eddy's uncles and aunts, and extended relatives born in Mauritius. In both families, those born in Mauritius were Catholic.[62] While not all Chinese Mauritians converted to Catholicism, many did. Within Hélène's and Eddy's family, those born or raised in Mauritius were Catholic with subsequent generations born into Catholicism.[63] Other Chinese Mauritians Hélène and Eddy knew were Protestant, if not Catholic. Neither of them recalled any Chinese individuals who converted to other major religions such as Islam or Hinduism.[64] Their Catholicism, far from simply a colonial imposition, served both as a strategy for social mobility and integration.[65] Hélène recalled that "to get work

[61] *Chinatown in the Heart of Mauritius, 170.*
[62] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 19, 2017.
[63] Eddy's mother was Catholic but practiced Buddhist customs. Eddy's father did not ascribe to any religion. Hélène recalled that her biological mother occasionally volunteered at a Buddhist pagoda, and her adoptive mother practiced Buddhism.
[64] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 19, 2017.
[65] Rosabelle Boswell has also demonstrated how Christian identities contributed to social advantages particularly for Créoles in Flacq—the largest district in Mauritius—even in the post-independence decades when middle-caste Hindu Indians dominated government positions. Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 79.

in government, you had to get baptized. Even if you're Hindu. That's what I heard."[66] Over time, Hélène's and Eddy's English- and French-speaking ability and Catholic identity provided them with a modicum of social mobility.

The General Election and Independence (1967 & 1968)

As part of the Chinese community in Mauritius, Eddy's and Hélène's families were part of an ethnic minority group that did not neatly fall into either side of the debate over independence. The independence of Mauritius from British colonial rule in 1968 served as another complex process of diasporic formation for Elodie's family. The political landscape of Mauritius around the years before and after independence had strong ethnoreligious and class-based undercurrents. In the 1930s, Mauritian plantation workers organized to form the Mauritian Labor Party (MLP) and challenged a small group of white elite sugar planters. Over the decades, the MLP's rallying point for Indo- and Afro-Mauritians evolved to liberating Mauritius from colonial rule. The MLP also gave rise to the political ascendency of the Indian community, and its members eventually took on the cause for independence.[67] Although the MLP originally formed as a trans-ethnic party to improve conditions of black Créole and Hindu Indian laborers, the former group feared Hindu domination and economic ruin with the prospect of independence. The main opposition to independence—*Parti Mauricien Sociale Démocrate* (PMSD)—united the sugar barons, many black Créole workers, and some Muslim Indians on a platform for Francophone Créole rights and anti-Hindu ascendency.[68] The Chinese in Mauritius belonged neither to the proletarian base like the plantation workers, nor did they figure among the sugar barons or elite Créoles.

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[66] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 19, 2017.
[67] Kasenally, "Mauritius: Paradise Reconsidered," 161.
[68] Henry Srebrnik, "'Full of Sound and Fury': Three Decades of Parliamentary Politics in Mauritius," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 279.

Rather than discussing his family's political stance on independence, Eddy talked about how the Chinese community and his family revered Sir Jean Etienne Moi Lin Ah Chuen—a local politician and business leader of the Chinese Mauritian community.[69] Eddy remembered, "there was a Chinese politician, right, who was really influential in the Chinese community, so [my family] just follow[ed] his lead."[70] Consequently, Chinese Mauritian politicians and the Chinese community they represented, were divided on the issue of independence. Of the four Sino-Mauritians listed in the 1967 legislative assembly, two affiliated with the PMSD and two with the party for independence.[71] Eddy also recalled a divided Chinese community on the issue of independence, but his family generally opposed it, following Sir Jean Etienne Moi Lin Ah Chuen who voted against independence. From Eddy's reflections, it seemed as though his family's opposition to independence was moderate, perhaps because neither side of the debate leveraged the concerns of the Chinese community—a relatively small and inconsequential voting pool.

The fervent debate and political campaigning over independence emphasized the insider/outsider status of the Chinese community, including the relatively recent Hakka migrants. As an entirely diasporic population, the debate for independence did not center around a reclaiming of land; rather religion, ethnicity, labor practices, and colonialism surfaced as prominent issues in the public discourse. Leading up to the August 1967 General Election, newspapers fervently published partisan headlines and articles in support for or against independence.[72] The *Mauritius Times*, for example, lauded the work of the pro-independence

[69] Sir Jean Etienne Moi Lin Ah Chuen is on the 25-rupee note, representing the Chinese faction of Mauritius. Other note denominations include prominent members of specific ethnoreligious communities.
[70] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2017.
[71] "The Legislative Assembly Elections Regulations, 1967 (Regulation 16(8))," *Le Mauricien*, July 24, 1967. FOK SEUNG, Fok Yan Ki (Marc Fok Seung) – PMSD; NG CHENG HIN, Nyan Siong – Independence Party; AH-CHUEN, Moi-Lin (Jean Etienne Moi Lim Ah-Cheun – PMSD; NG WONG HING, Miand Kwong – Independence Party.
[72] Mauritians voted for members of the General Assembly who would then cast their vote on independence.

Labor Party, whose political base comprised of Indo-Mauritian proletariats. To this end, the newspaper frequently evoked the language and history of colonial oppression. One headline article read, "PRIVATE FIRMS PRACTICE APARTHEID," indicting large businesses in Mauritius for practicing "defacto apartheid" and racial discrimination, particularly against Indo-Mauritians.[73] Closer to the election, another headline read, "Youth of Mauritius, unite! It's time you decide, To do or die! [*sic*] YES, YOU MUST WIN INDEPENDENCE OR FACE POLITICAL DEATH! YOU MUST BE FREE OR ONCE MORE BEAR THE CHAINS OF SLAVERY! YOUTH! ARISE, BE UP AND EXTERMINATE THE EMEMIES OF UNITY AND FREEDOM!" (Figure 1.4).[74] Although the Indo-Mauritians were never formally enslaved, this headline evoked the language of slavery to protest colonial control. Furthermore, pro-independence publications rallied the Indo-Mauritian population across religion and caste. For instance, the *Mauritius Times* publication on June 30, 1967 took a defensive stance against the anti-independence prime mister who preyed on fissures within the Hindu community (see Figure. 1.5).[75] Part of the headline read, "THE P.M. IS NOW OUT TO DIVIDE THE HINDUS INTO HIGH AND LOW CASTES, BUT HINDUS ARE NOT FOOLS, THEY WON'T ALLOW themselves to be duped [*sic*]." This long headline initiated with "Citizens of Mauritius unite!" but then exclusively addressed Hindus in Mauritius. The pro-independence platform seemed to have addressed its largest base—Hindu Indians and youth of Mauritius, excluding many of the other ethnic and religious groups.

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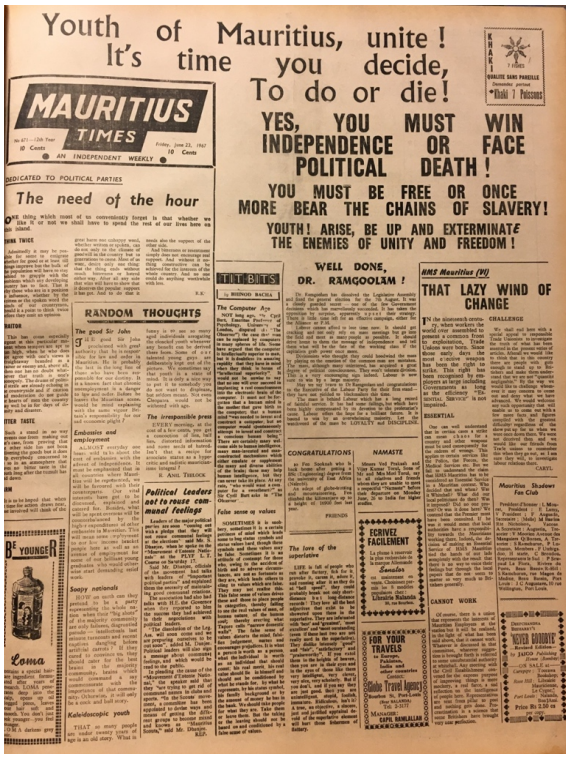
[73] "Private Firms Practice Apartheid," *Mauritius Times,* June 16, 1967.
[74] "Youth of Mauritius, Unite! It's Time for You to Decide [. . .]," *Mauritius Times,* June 23, 1967.
[75] "Citizens of Mauritius Unite! It's Time You Stand Up [. . .]," *Mauritius Times,* June 30, 1967. The full headline reads, "Citizens of Mauritius unite! It's time you stand up and crush the serpent of discord! INDEPENDENCE IS THE FIRST OF EARTHLY BLESSINGS – IT IS YOUR BIRTHRIGHT! THE P.M. IS NOW OUT TO DIVIDE THE HINDUS INTO HIGH AND LOW CASTES, BUT HINDUS ARE NOT FOOLS, THEY WON'T ALLOW themselves to be duped. They will oppose all Machiavellian stratagems to divide them."


Youth of Mauritius, unite !
It's time you decide,
To do or die !
YES, YOU MUST WIN INDEPENDENCE OR FACE POLITICAL DEATH !
YOU MUST BE FREE OR ONCE MORE BEAR THE CHAINS OF SLAVERY!
YOUTH! ARISE, BE UP AND EXTERMINATE THE ENEMIES OF UNITY AND FREEDOM !
MAURITIUS TIMES
AN INDEPENDENT WEEKLY
Friday, June 23, 1967
10 Cents
DEDICATED TO POLITICAL PARTIES
The need of the hour
RANDOM THOUGHTS
WELL DONE, DR. RAMGOOLAM !
THAT LAZY WIND OF CHANGE
Political leaders out to rouse communal feelings
FRIDAY'S CHRONICLE
TOLERATE OR DIE !
NO BELIEF IN 52 P.C. -- MINISTER
THE Vale Cultural Circle celebrated the Yaum-Un-Nabi Festival under the auspices of Al-Jadeed and Vale Cadienne Madrassahs with an unequalled pomp and splendour on Saturday June 24.


Citizens of Mauritius unite ! It's time you stand up and crush the serpent of discord !
INDEPENDENCE IS THE FIRST OF EARTHLY BLESSINGS – IT IS YOUR BIRTHRIGHT !
THE P.M. IS NOW OUT TO DIVIDE THE HINDUS INTO HIGH AND LOW CASTES. BUT HINDUS ARE NOT FOOLS, THEY WON'T ALLOW themselves to be duped. They will oppose all machiavellian stratagems to divide them.
MAURITIUS TIMES
AN INDEPENDENT WEEKLY
Friday, June 30, 1967
10 Cents
Only Labour cares
FRIDAY'S CHRONICLE
The Vale Cultural Circle celebrates Yaum-Un-Nabi

Conversely, the opposition took on a unifying platform that strategically embraced the Chinese community. *Le Mauricien*—a publication predominantly in French—unequivocally supported the PMSD and its stance against independence. Because of the PMSD's more ethnically heterogeneous base, articles in the newspaper called out to Créoles, Muslims, Hindus, and the Chinese for unity against independence. The rhetoric claimed that liberty came from loyalty to a united country rather than ethnicity. One headline read, *"Ne votez pas votre communauté, votez le parti"* (Don't vote for your community, vote for the party).[76] Two others read, *"Hindous de Maurice, vous êtes des Mauriciens!"* (Hindus of Mauritius, you are Mauritians),[77] and *"Créole, Musulman, Chinois ne vous suicidez pas!"* (Créole, Muslim, Chinese do not commit suicide!) (Figure 1.6).[78] Like the pro-independence stances, the opposition used the economy and wages as a point of contention. Articles in *Le Mauricien* argued that with independence, people could expect wage decreases, job loss, famine, and economic ruin. For those who opposed independence, the metropole offered the people of Mauritius economic stability, provisions, and protection.

[76] "Ne votez pas votre communauté, votez le parti," *Le Mauricien,* August 1, 1967. This was the headline for the front page, unattached to a specific article.
[77] "Hindous de Maurice, vous êtes des Mauriciens!," *Le Mauricien,* August 3, 1967. This was the headline for the front page, unattached to a specific article
[78] "Créole, Musulman, Chinois ne vous suicidez pas!," *Le Mauricien,* August 2, 1967.


Voterez-vous pour votre suicide ?
le mauricien
Mercredi 2 août 1967
Créoles, Musulmans, Chinois ne vous suicidez pas!
Vers la liquidation du Parti de l'Indépendance
Pour un Front commun
Qu'avez-vous fait du syndicalisme ?
UN APPEL de M. Ebrahim Dawood
Le BLOC ou la mort
L'agression à l'Office des Marchés
Mamad Hussein Owasil condamné à l'amende
Le remboursement de la taxe de 5% aux petits planteurs
Dernier avertissement au gouvernement Ramgoolam
Le représentant de l'Inde identifié à un parti?
M. Gaëtan Duval vous demande...
Une réception
Lettre de GAETAN DUVAL aux petits planteurs
Avis du Consulat Général de France
Tentative d'intimidation à Grand Bain-Pundra d'Or
VITA PLUS
SANTE, FORCE ET ENERGIE
A.B.C. STORE — PORT-LOUIS
NOUVEAU DÉBALLAGE !
sneakers
Bata Style 67
promenade détente loisirs plage
ADVANCE ne le dira-t-il donc pas ?
"Tous ça GOOD LOSERS !"
TISSUS
Pierre Laurent
les plus beaux de tout Maurice
AMOCO
UN DESSERT ROYAL
PNEUS SCOOTERS
Pour Vespa-Lambretta
FEDERAL STORE
Aux propriétaires de campements
CIRAL-R
ROGER FAYD'HERBE & CO. LTD.
DANIEL LAGESSE
YASHICA 12
Kwon Paty Yin STORE
FOOTBALL

Figure 1.6 *Le Mauricien* front cover Wednesday, August 7, 1967. (British Library)

The Chinese in Mauritius may not have factored centrally in the debate over independence, but the tensions inevitably penetrated the lives of that community. In August 1967, Mauritius won its independence, but by a small margin: forty-four percent of voters opposed it.[79] During the transition to independence from British rule, riots broke out between the Indians and Créoles, with the Créoles dreading what they called "Hindu Hegemony."[80] Eddy was in high school at the time and he remembered that a "racial war" erupted between Muslim Indian and Créole students. The strain between these groups of students represented larger riots that had

[79] Srebrnik, "Sound and Fury," 279.
[80] Kasenally, "Mauritius: Paradise Reconsidered," 162. At the time, Mauritians of Indian descent made up slightly more than half of the population. A. "Vital Mauritian Election," *Times* (UK), August 7, 1967.

occurred in Port Louis following the Legislative Assembly vote for independence.[81] The Créole students scattered around the island to other schools while the Muslim Indian students, along with Eddy and his siblings, remained.[82] Apparently, Eddy and his family remained unscathed during the rioting and racial violence of this period. He suggested that the Chinese community generally stayed out of the crossfires of increasing racial polarization because they were "low key, so they did not bother us," implying that the Chinese community tended not to incite controversy.[83] Hélène's family also remained largely unharmed, but she remembered the British troops monitoring her neighborhood. Her family lived on the outskirts of Port Louis where most of the violence took place. She recalled a group of Créoles asking her father to join them in protecting the neighborhood border from Muslim aggression. Her father refused to leave his wife and daughter. Hélène's biological relatives, however, lived in Port Louis, and sent their daughters to relatives at safe distances from the city violence.[84] Although Hélène's and Eddy's families remained unharmed by the rioting, the civil unrest impacted other members of the Chinese community, and Chinatown businesses located in Port Louis slowed. In January 1968, the British troops turned Chinatown into a buffer zone. Chinatown businesses were also subject to weapons searches. The troops imposed curfews and created a climate of suspicion, which ended the nightlife in the area.[85] Some Chinese shops also got caught in the crossfires through looting and vandalism.[86] The families of Eddy and Hélène did not directly experience violence, nonetheless they found themselves negotiating their own position during the transition to

[81] Ly Tio Fane-Pineo and Lim Fat, *From Alien to Citizen,* 218.
[82] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2017.
[83] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2017. Eddy made this statement regarding another racially charged riot in a few decades after independence, but generally insistent on the "low key" nature of Chinese Mauritians in the country's racial tensions. By "low key" he suggested that Chinese Mauritians generally did not assert their political will through violence or public demonstrations.
[84] Hélène Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, July 30, 2017.
[85] *Chinatown in the Heart of Mauritius*, 180.
[86] Ly Tio Fane-Pineo and Lim Fat, *From Alien to Citizen,* 218.

independence, in which each side mobilized ethnic and religious sentiment seeking to build alliances.

Diversity, Culture, Sport

One of the top priorities of the new country was thus ethnic "diversity management."[87] The forecast for Mauritius as a post-colonial state was grim. British officials predicted that the new nation, like other former colonial and plantation-based societies, was doomed to failure. Nonetheless, the new government's dedication to forming a unified multiethnic national identity helped prove the country an exception to the rule.[88] Ensuring diverse representation was also part of the new country's constitution. Specifically, Mauritius built a parliamentary system based on ethnic representation called the "best loser system."[89] In this structural commitment to equal and diverse representation, the Supreme Court appointed eight members in addition to the elected sixty-two member National Assembly. These eight members were to be drawn from the communal groups most underrepresented among elected delegates.[90]

The building of a nation dedicated to ethnic harmony was not simply a matter of legislative policy; it required the construction of a distinct Mauritian culture through cultural products and symbolic acts. Independence Day celebrations included cultural acts from the country's major ethnic groups. Although Eddy's family had initially opposed independence, they participated in Independence Day festivities. It seems that Eddy's family loyalty to the Chinese

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[87] The top two priorities of the newly independent government were economic growth and stability, and ethnic diversity management. Scholars assert that these two agendas—the economy and diversity—were constituent of one another since the country's strategy to becoming a successful postcolonial democracy and economy laid in keeping an overwhelming majority of its population gainfully employed across the ethnic spectrum.
[88] Roukaya Kasenally, "Managing Diversity and Social Harmony in Mauritius" (presentation, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, February 15, 2011).
[89] Srebrnik, "Sound and Fury," 279.
[90] Kasenally, "Mauritius: Paradise Reconsidered," 164. Kasenally and other scholars of Mauritius racial politics use the term "communal" to describe group organization along ethnic and ethnoreligious lines such as Indo-Hindus, Indo-Muslims, French Europeans, Chinese, blacks, and Créoles.

politician they supported took precedence over the cause of independence. Sir Jean Etienne Moi Lin Ah Chuen—who won his ward in the general election but voted against independence—had asked Eddy and other Chinese youth to partake in the Chinese dragon dance performance during one of the celebrations. Together, they represented the Chinese faction of Mauritius' multi-ethnic landscape. Eddy recalled: "yeah, I did the dragon dance [laughing]…I was the tail, but my cousin was the head."[91] At that time, Eddy was too young to vote, but his recollections of this historic moment and his participation in Mauritian independence events illustrate how the country sought to unify its ethnic and religious divisions through symbolic cultural gestures. Almost five decades after independence and residing in Canada, Eddy reminisced nostalgically about his participation in these celebrations.

Eddy also recalled a popular song at the time—"Anou Batir Nation Mauricien"—that was like an independence anthem.[92] The song was written in Mauritian Créole—the country's most widely spoken but non-instructional language.[93] *Sega* is also a popular genre of music in Mauritius thought to have originated from the maroons who sought refuge on *Le Morne* mountain. It represents the origins of Créole music of resistance.[94] Eddy briefly sang to me the part of the song that includes the major ethnic and religious groups of the nation: *Ki to Hindou, Ki to Musulman, Ki to Sinois, Ki to enn Cretien, Ki to Créole, Ki to enn Blanc* (Whether you are Hindu, Whether you are Muslim, Whether you are Chinese, Whether you are Créole, Whether you are White). The song begins in conciliatory terms: *Donne to la main, prend mo la main* (Give me your hand, take my hand). Eddy did not remember all the verses but later sent me the

[91] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2017.
[92] The song has other titles such as "*Anou Batir Nation Mauricien*" and "*Donne to la main, prend mo la main*." Elodie could not figure out which of the titles was the original.
[93] Conversely, the country's national anthem—"Motherland"—was written in English with a French translation.
[94] Bakker and Odendaal, "Managing Heritage," 231. I discuss the significance of this site in chapter 3.

lyrics. Subsequent verses spoke directly to the ethnic and religious tensions that rose in the wake of the 1967 election that determined independence and called for unity through rejecting communalism and embracing a Mauritian identity over and ethnic one. The last verse of the song also indicated Mauritius' awareness of its relative global position as a newly independent state: *Lizié tous pay apé guette nou pay (bis)* (The eyes of all countries are looking at our country). This line in the last stanza of the song signaled to Mauritians that the world was watching to see how postcolonial Mauritius would fare (see Appendix A). The ending of the song positioned Mauritius as the global "underdog" and advocated for unity so that the new nation could prove itself to the international community. Learning this song as a young teen, Eddy may not have recognized the full extent of the lyric's political overtones, but as an adult he remembered its conciliatory sentiment. With this song, Eddy's ethnic community was legible in the new country's landscape. Half a century later, Elodie's parents looked back fondly on these celebrations. They regularly attend, with their children, an annual Mauritian Independence Day celebration in Toronto that reaffirms their diasporic identity in commemoration of this historic event.

While "Anou Batir Nation Mauricien" and Independence Day celebrations represented symbolic performances staged to unify a multiethnic nation across domestic divisions, nationalists also sought to gain recognition within global communities. Access to the world of international sports was a means of building national pride and establishing an independent identity in the world of nations. Significantly, it was in the context of a growing movement for independence that the Mauritius Sports Association submitted its first request for recognition

with the aim of participating in the 1968 Mexico Olympics.[95] The International Olympic Committee (IOC) denied this first application due to the country's inability to restructure its sport governing bodies to comply with IOC policies. The IOC officially recognized the Mauritian Olympic Committee (MOC) in 1972, four years after the country gained independence.

Mauritius' enfranchisement to the IOC not only gave the country a place in the world's largest athletic event, it allowed the nation to assert its political views on apartheid and the Cold War. At the risk of losing their membership in the IOC without having ever participated in the Olympics, Mauritius declined to send athletes to the first two Games in which the country was eligible to compete. In 1976, Mauritius withdrew from the Montreal Olympics alongside twenty-eight African nations protesting New Zealand's participation in the Games. Just prior to that Olympics, New Zealand's rugby team had toured apartheid South Africa.[96] The following Olympics, the MOC supported the American-led boycott of the Moscow Games in 1980, which protested Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The country finally sent athletes to its first Olympics in 1984 in Los Angeles. Since then, Mauritius has sent athletes to every summer Olympics.[97]

International competitions offered a platform for states to perform their modernity, civility, and patriotism. For newly-independent Mauritius, international tournaments were ripe opportunities to showcase its postcolonial identity, culture, and progress. Although Mauritius did

[95] Monique Berlioux to Jean Delaitre, July 10, 1979, "Mauritius," Olympic Studies Centre Library. File name and reference code: "Recognition request of the NOC of Mauritius (MRI): correspondence and recognition," D-RM01-MAURI/004. Berlioux was the committee director from the International Olympic Committee and Delaitre was the president of the Mauritian Olympic Committee. The letter concerns details of the "Mauritius and Olympism" entry for the first volume of the "Encyclopedia of National Olympic Committees."

[96] Armin Rosen, "The Olympics Used to Be So Politicized that Most of Africa Boycotted in 1976," *Atlantic,* August 7, 2012, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/08/the-olympics-used-to-be-so-politicized-that-most-of-africa-boycotted-in-1976/260831/. The international athletic community unofficially placed an embargo on athletics in that country. The IOC had barred the country from the Olympics since 1964 and disqualified their IOC membership.

[97] Mauritius has never participated in the winter Olympics.

not participate in the Olympics until 1984, the country engaged in other IOC-sanctioned events such as the first *Jeux des Îles de l'Océan Indien* (also known as the Indian Ocean Island Games) in 1979. The IOC endorsed Regional Games as part of its broader mission to encourage the worldwide development of sport and inclusivity in Olympic competition.[98] In the wake of decolonization that swept Africa after World War II, the IOC had increased its efforts to recruit more African nations to the Olympics.[99] In a report on the progress of the first Indian Ocean Island Games Maurice Herzog recognized the varied and new international status of countries in Africa and Indian Ocean states, as well as questioned how to support the regional event and its participants. In 1985—one year after the country's Olympic debut—Mauritius hosted the second Indian Ocean Islands Games—an event that included Réunion, Seychelles, Madagascar, Maldives, Comoro Islands, and Mauritius. Hosting the Indian Ocean Island Games enabled Mauritius to work with IOC leadership and other regional sport governing bodies. This opportunity demonstrated that Mauritius had the capability to organize internationally recognized events, thus establishing the country in modern sporting realms.

The "Mauritian Miracle"

In these decades after independence, scholars and international organizations lauded Mauritius as an African postcolonial success story—an economic triumph and a stable multi-ethnic democracy. Mauritius was at its height with regard to employment and foreign investments. It was also at this time that the island nation joined the ranks of middle-income

[98] Maurice Herzog, report assessing preparations for the first Indian Ocean Island Games, n.d, "Indian Ocean Island Games," Olympic Studies Centre Library. File name and reference code: "Indian Ocean Island Games: 1st edition at Reunion Island in 1979, 2nd edition at Mauritius in 1985 and 3rd edition at Madagascar in 1990: correspondence," H-FC03-JOCEA/001. Herzog was President of International Commission and an IOC member. The date of the report is missing but it refers to a follow up meeting on October 14-15, 1977.
[99] Guttmann, *Olympics*, 108.

countries.[100] In short, the success of Mauritius diverged from the fates of many other plantation-driven economies. Yet narratives that celebrate Mauritius as a prosperous "rainbow nation" or refer to the country as the "Mauritian Miracle" obscure on-going processes of racialization and dispossession rooted in the island nation's history of slavery and colonialism. Many of these international reports focus on political, economic, and racial formation during and after the 1967 referendum for independence. To the extent that they address the history of the region in the period before independence, they paint slavery and early racialized labor systems with broad brushstrokes, collapsing Mauritius into a generalized history of colonialism and the slave trade. In other words, Mauritius was but another plantation outpost under successive colonial rule with a history that mirrored other island plantations and African dependencies. This generalized narrative enables readings of Mauritius as a case study of post-colonial success, concealing the specificities of the place that directed the country in a trajectory different from other post-colonial states.

For instance, since independence, Mauritian national identity has been reconfigured around conceptions of a revived global Asian diasporic kinship.[101] By the late 1960s, newspapers already reflected strong diasporic ties to India. Furthermore, N.L. Aumeerally has examined the way that the "miracle" narratives of Mauritius' post-independence "boom years" were constructed around tropes of the Asian tiger. Aumeerally argues that Mauritius' incorporation into the tiger geography was arbitrated through its global self-fashioning as an island nation of Asian diasporic heritage.[102] The revival of the Asian diasporic kinship during post-independence

[100] Kasennally, "Mauritius: Paradise Reconsidered," 165.
[101] N. L. Aumeerally, "'Tiger in Paradise': Reading Global Mauritius in Shifting Time and Space," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (2005): 172.
[102] Aumeerally, 162. Aumeerally argues that Mauritius embraced an Asian diasporic modernity founded on a convergence of Western capitalism and neo-Orientalist constructs.

had attracted Chinese investors from both China and within Mauritius.[103] The Chinese in Mauritius had already thrived in commercial groups, and played instrumental roles in developing transnational industries in Mauritius.[104] Postcolonial imaginings of Mauritius thus served as an economic, cultural and geographic intermediary between Asia and Africa.[105] In this imagining, Mauritius elites touted its Chinese diasporic population and the group's importance for the country's transnational connections.[106] This further elevated the group's status in the country's socioeconomic hierarchy. Although Eddy's and Hélène's families claimed no relation to the elite Chinese of Mauritius, the country perceived the Chinese as transnationally connected and economically savvy. This stereotype had the potential to benefit members of that ethnic community, which faced fewer barriers to entry into education and professional spaces.

With the advent of independence, the Chinese born in Mauritius were granted citizenship, which granted them access to land and property. Mauritian-born Chinese shopkeepers and their children now had the potential to work in civil service and own their businesses and homes, greatly improving their labor and living conditions.[107] Eddy and Hélène's generation came into adulthood in the first decade following Mauritian independence—a time during which a distinct labor pattern emerged within their families and the Chinese Mauritian community more broadly. Eddy and some of his brothers started working beyond the terrain of traditional shop-keeping, while some of the women started working outside of the home. Eddy worked as a land surveyor; Hélène was a travel agent who journeyed extensively for work; and Eddy's sister Mary worked

[103] Lincoln, "Beyond the Plantation," 73.
[104] Srebrnik, "Sound and Fury," 277.
[105] Aumeerally, "Tiger in Paradise," 163. Aumeerally argues that Mauritius' postcolonial objectification as this hybrid state derived from its own commodification for Asian investors and the European tourist market. The country's marketing revitalized Mauritius' nineteenth century geographic lure as an Indian Ocean state that attracted French and British colonizers to engage in commerce between Africa and Asia.
[106] Aumeerally, 169.
[107] Ly Tio Fane-Pineo and Lim Fat, *From Alien to Citizen*, 220.

as a nurse. Despite growing up relatively poor, Eddy and Hélène had managed to acquire the education that facilitated upward mobility. And while Eddy's and Hélène's parents worked hard to ensure their children's education, the sociocultural stratification of Mauritius had placed the Chinese relatively higher than descendants of plantation workers and ex-slaves. As part of the merchant class which held more social status, Chinese families had the benefit of entering more easily into Mauritius' postcolonial economies.

Emigration

Nonetheless, the relative post-independence success of Mauritius did not resolve problems rooted in histories of colonialism, slavery, and ethnic division, leading to high rates of migration to more developed countries. After the Mauritian people elected their first prime minister, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, a significant exodus took place as bourgeois Créoles, British, and French emigrated from the islands to more developed nations.[108] The remaining Franco Mauritians known as *Grand Blancs* (sugar barons who later invested in banking, insurance, and the manufacturing sector) stayed at the top of the socioeconomic hierarchy throughout the 1970s, followed by Chinese, Muslims, and Hindus. Chinese Mauritians also sought job opportunities in and emigrated to wealthier nations—another indication the ethnic group's relative privilege.[109] Strikingly, between the late 1960s to the late 1980s, half of Eddy's sisters and brothers and several of his cousins emigrated to other countries, including Canada, the U.S., South Africa, England, Singapore, Indonesia, Réunion, and Switzerland—locations that

[108] Kasennally, "Mauritius: Paradise Reconsidered," 162. Locations included Australia, France, South Africa, and Great Britain.

[109] Clement Chan's survey of Hakkas in contemporary Mauritius asserts that that there is no official information on the emigration of Chinese in Mauritius. However, Chan argues that fear of independence caused many Chinese Mauritians to emigrate in the 1960s. Chan also notes that anecdotal information from families and emigration agencies suggest on-going emigration to the West. Clement Chan, *Hakkas Worldwide*, (Moka, Mauritius: DCI Studios, 2010), 245.

now have established Chinese Mauritian communities and organizations.[110] Many of them worked or studied abroad in those locations and eventually settled.

While the ability to emigrate connoted privilege, the Chinese in Mauritius who left were generally not elite but middle-class. Eddy and Elodie viewed the on-going trend of Chinese emigrants from Mauritius as a matter of thriving:

> Eddy: So, Yuka. [The Chinese] that are well off, they don't want to leave the country. But most of the Chinese that find it hard, will migrate. That's why the Chinese population in Mauritius is less and less.
>
> Elodie: So, the middle-class Chinese people in Mauritius would be the ones who immigrate to Canada, or leave the country, versus the ones who do *really* well [in Mauritius are] like, "I have a good life here, why would I leave?"[111]

When Hélène and Eddy immigrated to Canada, they had already ascended to middle-class status in Mauritius. Having grown up poor in a plantation colony, Eddy had experienced socioeconomic hardship in a way that Elodie had not. Consequently, Elodie and Eddy viewed emigration from Mauritius in slightly different ways. They both viewed the Chinese who remained in Mauritius as an elite group, living the "good life." However, Elodie regarded Chinese emigrants as solidly middle-class, suggesting that they enjoyed a greater element of choice in their decision to pursue a better life outside of Mauritius. Conversely, Eddy situated Chinese Mauritian emigrants within a dwindling subgroup of the country that struggled to live comfortably. He also alluded to the negative impact of being an ethnic minority in Mauritius through his observation that Indo-Mauritians migrate less because "they're the majority there." Furthermore, both Elodie and Eddy inadvertently distanced their migratory experience from the

[110] This information is taken from Eddy's family tree album, as well as from conversations with Eddy about his family over the years.
[111] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2017.

emigration trends of middle-class Chinese Mauritians, by not actively naming themselves in the group.

Hélène and Eddy claimed to have migrated in search of adventure and economic opportunity, unlike Elodie's grandparents, forced to migrate due to economic and political hardship in China or the Chinese in contemporary Mauritius who "find it hard." Their divergent story may have been a way to reconstruct their migration as an act of agency especially when compared to earlier generations and in light of the violence and restructuring they witnessed after independence. While Hélène and Eddy recognized the challenges they were leaving behind in Mauritius, they emphasized the "pull" factor toward in their migration story. When I initially asked the family why they moved to Canada, Hélène and Eddy laughed and said that they had heard that money there grew on trees. Hélène initially planned to work in Canada to make money and return to Mauritius, but she said, "we liked it so much we stayed."[112] When I asked why, Eddy explained that he saw Canada as an adventure. Hélène elaborated:

> Hélène: Yeah, maybe for me, I have always wanted to travel; to live in another country for some reason. I don't know why. Maybe it's for the adventure. I just wanted to leave Mauritius.
>
> Elodie: You also traveled with your work, so, you kind of got a taste of traveling.
>
> Hélène: Yeah, but never came to Canada. I mainly went to the Far East, like Asia. And then Europe, a few places, that's all.[113]

Their emphasis on choice and adventure obscure the lengthy process of immigration which started a few years prior to their arrival in Canada, the four years to become naturalized citizens, and the challenging conditions of their early years as new immigrants. Whether or not they

[112] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, February 3, 2017. They also considered Australia, but Hélène vaguely recalled that her father had applied to go to Australia and was rejected on the basis of his ethnicity. A year after settling to Canada, Hélène brought her parents over to live with her.
[113] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 3, 2017.

distanced their emigration narrative from that of their ethnic community in Mauritius, Hélène and Eddy's foregrounding of adventure is inextricably linked to their ethnic identification.

Figure 1.7 Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Eddy, Kimmy, Hélène, and Elodie Li Yuk Lo, presiding judge (from left to right). At the family's Canadian naturalization ceremony, 1993. (Courtesy Li Yuk Lo family)

Eddy and Hélène identified their Hakka roots both as a natural motivation for their migration to Canada and as a means of explaining the growing Chinese Mauritian community in Toronto. Eddy said: "We are like nomads. We like to move around. So, we cannot stay in one place."[114] In using the pronoun "we," Eddy was not only referring to himself and Hélène, but to a larger collective of Hakka migrants across various generations within his family. Furthermore, it is common among Hakkas in diaspora to emigrate twice: once from China, and then again to another overseas location. For instance, many Hakka in Canada are from India, the Caribbean, or

[114] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 3, 2017.

parts of Latin America.[115] In our various conversations over the years, Hélène, Elodie, and Elodie's younger sister Kimmy all identified with the Hakka proclivity toward migration and travel. Rather than rooting their identities in a single geography, the family associates "home" with migration itself, or what they like to call a "nomadic" spirit.

While the family tended to speak of their migration to Canada and rooted their identity in migratory tendencies, Elodie has grappled both publicly and privately with her "origins" and sense of "home" in Canada, Mauritius, and China. Unlike her parents, Elodie grew up in Canada with an ethnic landscape that conceived of Asians, particularly Chinese, as perpetual foreigners. In Mauritius, the founding fiction of nation is one of an entirely diasporic populace in which the Chinese hold relatively higher status, whereas in Canada, white settler hegemony in the 1980s and 1990s occluded Canadian First Nations while categorizing Chinese immigrants as "guests." In "multicultural Canada," Elodie's tenuous belonging relied on essentialized notions of culture that maintained roots in a distinct geographical origin. As a result, her parents' way of perceiving home as a process rooted in their Hakka penchant for migration did not serve Elodie in Canada. Elodie remembered the early years in Canada as difficult and longed for the familiarity of her family, friends, and ethnic community. Yet, during our conversation about immigrating to Canada, she confided that her life would have been more difficult had she grown up in Mauritius.

Hélène and Eddy's euphemism—"adventure"—for immigrating to Canada consequently represented a mixture of factors: nostalgia for life in Mauritius; the Hakka migratory spirit; socioeconomic inequalities between the two countries; and different global circumstances for migration across generations. Their attachment to the "nomadic" Hakka narrative may have represented a strategy for reconciling memories of displacement from generations past into new

[115] Lozada, "Hakka Diaspora," 95. Many Hakka reside in South Africa, France, Britain, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Mauritius, Canada, USA, Australia, and New Zealand.

sensibilities of home: rooting home in the process of migration. In comparison with the conditions under which Hélène's and Eddy's parents and ancestors migrated, their decision to migrate to Canada indeed seemed like a choice rather than a refuge. Yet while there was a clear sense of choice and adventure in their recollections, they also left behind challenging circumstances. For Elodie, one of the benefits of immigrating to Canada was escaping the high-stakes nature of education in Mauritius that would have limited her athletic opportunities. When I asked whether Elodie would have played sports had she grown up in Mauritius, Elodie said she felt "like my life would just be school, lessons, tutorials afterschool, and then home. There was no time to do anything else."[116] Then Hélène explained that children started supplemental lessons at age eight and nine years old to win scholarships to go to the best high schools. After that, the goal was to win scholarships to study outside of Mauritius. In Canada and the U.S., the desire for higher educational attainment tends to represent middle-class values. While this may also be the case in Mauritius, the anecdote illustrates that for Elodie and her family, educational attainment coupled with emigration equaled a chance at a better life, highlighting the global disparities between Mauritius and sought-after geographies like the U.K., Canada, the U.S., and France.

Rooting in Religion

For Elodie and her family, religion served, and continues to serve, as a core aspect of their identities, inseparable from their stories as migrants. Once established in Canada, the legacies of the family's postcolonial and hybrid identities continued to evolve. Particularly, the family had gained a different perspective of their spiritual practices in Mauritius that stimulated a religious transformation representing a shedding and adopting of old and new spiritualties, respectively. As the family explained, Catholicism as practiced in Mauritius among the Chinese

[116] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 3, 2017.

community commonly took on Buddhist-Catholic hybridized forms. These hybrid expressions of religion and culture sometimes travelled to new geographies when Chinese Mauritians migrated to other countries. But for Elodie and her family, the religious non-exclusivity of Buddhist-Catholicism represented their past lives in Mauritius:

> Hélène: The older generation. They are mostly Buddhist.
>
> Eddy: They have like, dual.
>
> Hélène: Buddhism plus Catholicism.
>
> Yuka: And were any members of your family both Buddhist and Catholic?
>
> Eddy: All of them. Even now my brothers [in Mauritius] are still, both. That's only allowed in Mauritius.
>
> Elodie: No other places?
>
> Eddy: No because, the church itself [in Mauritius] allows it.
>
> Elodie: Really?
>
> Eddy and Hélène: Yeah.
>
> Eddy: The candles and the…
>
> Hélène: It's more cultural.
>
> Elodie: The incense.
>
> Eddy: Incense. So, they do it in the church sometimes.[117]

From the temporal and geographical vantage point of immigrants to Canada, these hybrid Buddhist-Catholic practices in Mauritius carried new meaning for the impact of colonization on ancestral and religious practices for the family. While Elodie said that some Chinese Mauritians converted from Catholicism to evangelical Christianity in Mauritius, the entire family associated

[117] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 3, 2017.

hybrid Buddhist-Catholic practices with a unique cultural practice in Mauritius. Other ethnicities in Mauritius such as Créoles in Flacq also hybridized their faith or rejected orthodoxy. In so doing, they contributed to the hybridizing of society and challenged cultural hierarchies linked to fixed ideas of race and faith.[118]

The family's discussion of Buddhist-Catholicism among Chinese in Mauritius also demonstrates how religious identities and practices are passed down through generations, as well as how they evolve with time, through different geographies and social contexts.[119] Hélène associated Buddhism with the older generations, while Elodie—of the youngest generation and twice removed from ancestral China—hardly recalled this hybridized practice in Mauritius. Eddy declared that only in Mauritius was it permissible to engage in Buddhist activities within Catholicism. Yet he suspected that some Chinese Mauritians in Toronto had continued the practice in Canada. Hélène and Eddy described this form of religious practice as "dual" and "both" religions rather than a single and distinct form of hybridization suggesting how tensions between cultures manifested in religious practices. For instance, Eddy positioned the church as the dominant religious fixture that exhibited some flexibility by "allowing" incense, but only in Mauritius. Hélène, on the other hand, viewed this practice as "cultural" attempting to separate culture from religion. I asked if they grew up Buddhist-Catholics in Mauritius. Eddy said, "Yeah. We just went with our parents, right? Just for the sake of going with them. But, we were not very involved."[120] Through their migration and their activities in Toronto's St. Patrick's Catholic church, Eddy and Hélène were able to critically compare their spiritual practices in Mauritius

[118] Boswell, *Ethnic Identity in Mauritius,* 103.
[119] Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity,* 12.
[120] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 3, 2017.

and Canada and deliberately evolve this aspect of their identities to align more closely with their new religious landscape.

Deeper into their years in Canada, Elodie, her family, and other Chinese Mauritians shifted from the cultural norms of Chinese Mauritian Catholicism to a version of Christianity that they considered an unadulterated devotion to Jesus Christ. Within a decade of living in Toronto, Eddy, Hélène, and their second daughter Kimmy became evangelical. Elodie later joined them in 2008. She wanted to come to the decision to leave Catholicism on her own. She did not take this decision lightly and has since reflected continually on the distinctions between her past and current spirituality. I include at length Elodie's and Eddy's explanation of how their current practice in Canada differed from their earlier practice in both Canada and Mauritius:

> Elodie: So, I think the difference is, the Catholics are used to the rituals, right? Like burning the candles before you pray to whoever, Mary or Jesus. Like my grandmother used to burn a candle every morning and every night to pray. Versus Christians who kind of understand the difference between following Christ and all these other practices where you're praying to other Gods. We believe in only one God, and so you know, if we are following what God says, then…the Buddhist practices don't fall into…
>
> Eddy: …like it's idolatry.
>
> Elodie: Yeah, it's idolatry.
>
> Yuka: And with Catholicism, it's a little bit more permissible to have other practices?
>
> Elodie: At least the ones in Mauritius.
>
> Eddy: I mean they pray to the Virgin Mary, right? For example, and the Saints.
>
> Yuka: Is that the reason why you guys became Born Again Christians?
>
> Eddy: No. The main reason is that we believe in Jesus Christ as our savior, so he's the only one that can save us. So that's why we became Born Again.
>
> Elodie: Versus what do the Catholics say?
>
> Eddy: The Catholics say, if you do good work, and go to church and do all the good stuff,

Elodie: Go to confession . . .

Eddy: Yeah.

Yuka: Did other Mauritians in Canada change as well?

Eddy: Yeah, the group that we met the other day [at a Chinese New Year celebration in February 2017]. Most of them were Catholics before.

Elodie: Some of them even changed in Mauritius.[121]

While the transition from Catholicism to evangelical Christianity overlapped with their settling into life in Canada, for Elodie and Eddy this was mere coincidence rather than a function of their migration. As Eddy asserted, the family's motive to change stemmed from their devotion to Jesus with conviction that only He can save them, not through "do[ing] good work" to get to heaven.

Simultaneously, the family viewed their immigration as the providence of God, and early on they formed group identity primarily through religion interlaced within a small community of Chinese Mauritians also settling in Toronto around the same time. Mirella Lam Hang was particularly instrumental in the family's Canadian integration. She had co-founded an evangelical non-profit organization called New Life, which provided and continues to provide social events, Bible studies, and fellowship to evangelical Mauritians in Toronto. Mirella had moved to Canada a few years prior to the Li Yuk Lo family and had immigrated with religious conviction. She told me:

> I know God wanted me to come to Canada because I prayed over it…my desire was to serve God. I prayed to God, "Okay, now that I'm in Canada, what do you want me to do?" I just left it at that. Then I heard that another Mauritian was here. Her name is Marilyn—a friend of mine. She was also a Christian. So, I contacted her. And then there was another girl who came to Canada, but she went to Vancouver but somehow, she wanted to come to Toronto. She knew both of us. So, we [all] decided to meet. And then I said, "It is not by coincidence that we're here. I believe God has a purpose for us. What

[121] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, conversation, February 19, 2017.

> do you think?" They said, "Yes. We're not here for nothing." Then I said, "Why don't we pray about it. We meet once a week and prayed about it." We [would go] to city hall after work, we'd meet once a week and we'd pray. And when we were praying we somehow started to meet a few Mauritians. So, we said, "Okay, let's invite them to see sights. We'll go and visit CN Tower and Center Island." So, that's how we started. And then we started to go to Church…At that same time there was an influx of immigrants from Mauritius. So, of course we wanted to meet together because these are the only people we know. So, that's how we started New Life. And once we started, we would do Bible study, we would go to different homes, and then God just works. And people started to get to God. Their lives were transformed. And slowly little by little things happened.[122]

It was through New Life's badminton and basketball gym sessions that Mirella met Eddy, Hélène, and their daughters. The organization rented out a space with a gym and kitchen at a community house near Gerard and Parliament streets. In our discussion about New Life, Mirella never alluded to the ethnic composition of the group, though when I asked, she told me that it started off with Chinese Mauritians and currently there are a few non-Chinese Mauritians, and some non-Mauritian Christians. Despite her lack of emphasis on ethnic community, the story of New Life's founding was inextricably linked to immigrant narratives. For instance, in a picture-filled slide show celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the organization (in 2008), the first ten slides read:

> Canada, land of dreams and hopes. With its beautiful landscape and vast land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey. Abounding with food; all kinds of meat, vegetables and fruits. Since 1986 – Large influx of Mauritians, Mostly [*sic*] young professionals in their mid to late twenties. They had high hopes & expectations: job, car, house, greater achievements…But they were soon disillusioned by the realities of everyday life. Loneliness, hostilities and expensive small apartments, And [*sic*] the bitter cold were their lot."[123]

The remaining forty-four slides highlighted the religious development of the organization, melding faith, prayer, and God into the success of the members' settlement. It emphasized

[122] Mirella Lam Hang, in conversation with the author, July 7, 2017. Elodie and Hélène Li Yuk Lo were also present.
[123] Mirella Lam Hang, slideshow celebration of New Life's twentieth anniversary, 2008, provided by Mirella Lam Hang.

community growth as well as the expansion of New Life as a space in which members shared ethnic, diasporic, and religious bonds (see Appendix B). She understood her migration and that of others as an act of God and through the lens of her faith. Eddy and Hélène similarly viewed their immigration from this perspective. After listing several reasons for moving to Canada, Elodie's parents ultimately stated, "it's God's plan."

During the conversion to evangelical Christianity, the family switched from St. Patrick's Catholic Church to The Chinese Gospel Church—another site for cultural identity formations. The Chinese Gospel Church is a multi-congregational community situated in the Toronto's downtown Chinatown, a ten-minute walk away from the family's home. A missionary couple founded the Church in 1963 and it is part of the Associated Gospel Churches of Canada.[124] While this Church community comprised largely of non-Mauritian Chinese immigrants, Elodie and her family connected with a small Mauritian subgroup in the Church, and through this community subsumed themselves within a larger Chinese immigrant group in the Toronto area. At the time of their immigration, downtown Chinatown was predominantly Cantonese-speaking Chinese. Elodie had expressed a sense of rejection from this community—outside of the church—for her inability to communicate in Cantonese. This coupled with a lingering tension between Cantonese and Hakka Chinese in Mauritius may have contributed to the way the family sought ethnic community through religion. The family's membership in this broad Christian community helped identify them as part of a large and preexisting immigrant group in Canada and rooted their sense of belonging within Canada's dominant religious landscape. Significantly, the family did not view their conversion as a loss of Buddhist roots due to colonialism and migration, nor did they ground themselves in Toronto solely through ethnic ties. Instead, they

[124] "History," Chinese Gospel Church (website), accessed June 13, 2017, http://www.chinesegospelchurch.ca/?i=14865&mid=1000&id=361968.

integrated themselves in Toronto through transforming their faith. The changes in how the family practices Christianity illustrate the dynamic convergence of religious, cultural, generational, and migratory identities.

Conclusion

The testimony of Elodie and her family reveals the lasting impact of nineteenth century colonialism on present-day lives. The ruptures precipitated by global powers in their quest for colonies and world supremacy forever reconfigured the identities of their subjects. The way that colonizers changed and misinterpreted the names of Chinese migrants is but one example of the intimate transformations that occurred upon their arrival in a new colony. Elodie's surname, Li Yuk Lo, remains a vestige of her ancestral ties to Chinese indentured labor in Africa.

Shifts in communication and travel from the mid- to late-twentieth century extended ideas of citizenship and self beyond national boundaries.[125] Given these shifts, postcolonial scholars now argue that idea of "home" represents an enigmatic construct, as it can both embody a physical place and symbolize an imagined longing for somewhere else.[126] Yet the testimony of Elodie's family, and its multiple migrations from China to Mauritius and then to Canada, suggest a different understanding of diasporic subjectivity. The family roots its ethnic identity in the Hakka Chinese propensity for continual migration rather than in a specific place of origin or an imagined "homeland." The family's migration to Canada further confounds notions of "home" in that they emigrated from a country that claims its entire population as peoples from other places. As a former plantation colony, Mauritius achieved relative post-independence success. The country deployed narratives of Asian diasporic kinship founded in a history of colonialism as a means of bolstering economic ties between Africa and Asia after independence. Despite the

[125] Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity,* 11.
[126] Agnew, 15; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012).

country's triumphs after gaining independence, Mauritius could not mend all of its problems, entrenched as they were in legacies of slavery and ethnic divisions. The result was mass emigration of Europeans, elite Créoles, and Chinese including the migration of Elodie's family to Canada.

Elodie's family serves as a living archive that exposes the impact of colonialism on the global flow of migrants. While the family represents a unique group with a little-known history of Asians in Africa, its stories herald trends in twenty-first century migration, and challenge the ways that diasporic subjects are expected to negotiate their belonging to a nation. The family's identities evolved in response to the social and historical conditions of each new "home," producing hybrid forms of culture. This was especially evident in the Li Yuk Lo family's own religious practice. Their discussion of Buddhist-Catholicism underscored the convergence of culture, immigration, spirituality, and intergenerational relationships in the process of identity formation.

The testimony of Elodie's family also exposes the weakness of essentialist notions of national identity that promote the construction of rigid symbolic and physical borders. In the late 1980s, the Li Yuk Lo family brought with them to Canada their hybridized identities rooted in rich legacies of religious, linguistic, and cultural melding. Canada, at the time was only beginning to form its own plural identity. The country's vision of multiculturalism had encouraged diasporic subjects to celebrate and keep their cultures intact, albeit in static and essentialized forms. These cultural communities would make up Canada's multicultural mosaic, bolstering a harmonious picture of a plural and tolerant Canada. Elodie and her family did not neatly fit into this multicultural paradigm. Elodie, who attended schools with prominent Chinese immigrant populations, found herself absorbed into that community. As a result, she was

vulnerable to the stereotypes of that community, which magnified during her quest to play competitive sports in Canada. She nonetheless managed to negotiate her diasporic subjectivity and form a new and independent identity for herself.

CHAPTER 2

Competing Identities

As much as you think about [identity politics], when it comes down to it, you're there to win and compete and I think that's what I was talking about with the "athlete in me." It's like the competition itself is just.

—Elodie Li Yuk Lo[1]

On April 19, 1989 Elodie arrived with her family in Toronto. Elodie experienced the move as a tremendous rupture from her life in Mauritius.[2] As the first grandchild on both sides of her family, Elodie had received extra attention from her relatives. Until leaving Mauritius, Elodie's world had consisted of constant interaction with her extended family. As a six-year-old, she could make little sense of her new life abroad. For the first month and a half in Canada, Elodie, Kimmy, Eddy, and Hélène shared a one-bedroom apartment with another woman and her two sons.[3] The building, Fifty Stephanie, was located on the south-eastern edge of Toronto's largest Chinatown, which housed many recent Chinese immigrants. Elodie slept on the floor and recalled feeling suffocated by the lack of space and her parents' insistence that she refrain from making noise in their hosts' home. When a one-bedroom apartment opened up in the building, they moved in immediately.

At the time of her immigration, Elodie encountered a nation that since the 1960s had constructed itself as a global leader in its support of multiculturalism.[4] Canada was one of the first nations to declare its public commitment to diversity, and ranked high in

[1] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, March 29, 2016.
[2] Hélène had started work at the Ministry of Education the next day. Eddy took care of Kimmy during the day until she was ready to attend daycare. He also worked part time as a dishwasher while looking for a job in his field as a land surveyor.
[3] This woman was a friend from Mauritius who had immigrated a little before the Li Yuk Lo family.
[4] Rattansi, *Multiculturalism*, 7.

its adoption of multiculturalist policies.[5] In the late 1960s, the Canadian federal government had retracted discriminatory policies within its immigration system, and had established the Ministry of Multiculturalism and the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism by 1973.[6] Unlike the American ideal of the "melting pot," Canada's multiculturalism boasted less assimilation and more cultural preservation. In elementary school, Elodie soon learned that she, along with other racial minorities, was to compose Canada's harmonious cultural mosaic. Each piece of the mosaic represented a unique culture, perceived as a singular, undifferentiated group. This rhetoric represented Canada as a nation that both welcomed immigrants into the country and allowed them to preserve their cultures. However, the piece of Canada's mosaic in which Elodie and her family were supposed to fit subsumed and erased their unique diasporic identities.

The entire family soon found itself conflated with a large predominantly Cantonese-speaking Chinese community in Toronto's downtown core. But, speaking no Cantonese and only a modest amount of English, Hélène and Eddy remained outsiders to the Chinese diasporic community. Even as their ethnicity and familiarity with some aspects of the food and culture positioned them inside Toronto's larger Chinese diaspora. Elodie and Kimmy attended Ogden Public Elementary just four hundred meters away from their Fifty Stephanie home. The school was located on the southern border of Chinatown and its students were overwhelmingly first- or second-generation Cantonese Chinese immigrants. There, school administrators placed Elodie in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class with virtually all Cantonese-speaking students, despite the

[5] Rattansi, 15.
[6] Jean Burnet and Leo Driedger, "Multiculturalism," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, article published June 27, 2011, http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/multiculturalism/.

fact that bilingual Cantonese-English teachers could not bridge the linguistic gap. Had they spoken French, they would have been more likely to have succeeded in communicating with Elodie. Even though Elodie belonged to the ethnic majority at school, her inability to communicate in English or Cantonese meant that she felt like a social outcast. Elodie struggled to find community in ethnic ties as she had in Mauritius, but the few friends Elodie made from ESL class were tenuous at best; during recess, they excluded her by speaking Cantonese.

Sport, however, represented one promising arena of identity formation for Elodie in the context of migration, and it soon became a primary focus in her life. Elodie found refuge in gym class—the one place where she could express herself without needing to speak English. The gymnasium had always been a place filled with fond memories. In Mauritius, Elodie had tagged along with her father to watch him and his brother play basketball; at Ogden, Elodie excelled in physical education and participated in afterschool teams such as floor hockey and softball. As she explained, "I loved [sport] for the sheer fun element and then realized I was good and got really competitive."[7] While the level of competition remained largely recreational, both teachers and students noticed that her athletic abilities exceeded those of her peers. Elodie's parents soon enrolled her in the local community center's swim team and sports leagues. These afterschool activities bought Hélène and Eddy a few extra hours of childcare, while for Elodie, they provided a space where she felt less like an outsider.[8] Elodie entered a Canadian athletic

[7] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, August 9, 2017.
[8] The University Settlement House located in Toronto's Chinatown was across the street from the Li Yuk Lo family's residence when Elodie was in elementary school. The Settlement House provided outreach, activities, and childcare services to the neighborhood. It also hired staff to escort students from Elodie's elementary school to the community center afterschool.

context with a longstanding "leftist" tradition of social interventions through sports in schools that "Christian socialists" developed as their rendition of muscular Christianity in the late 1800s. During the 1990s, Canada embraced a "values-based-approach" yet disbanded the Canadian Sport Council, Canadian Sport and Recreation Centre, and programs that helped bolster athletes to higher levels of competition.[9] Nonetheless, school and community sport leagues played an increasingly prominent role in Elodie's educational experience. As the required level of skill and competition increased through middle school and then high school, so did Elodie's involvement in extracurricular leadership positions. Elodie captained teams, assisted with school fundraisers, helped organize school events, and eventually served on student council as the Girls' Athletic Association president. Her athletic achievements at school helped Elodie develop a reputation independent of her immigrant status, and they provided an avenue to practice civic engagement in a broader Canadian community. In sum, sport catalyzed Elodie's transition to Canada.

Sport thus offered Elodie opportunities to develop identity in Canada and exercise agency in contexts of marginalization. Having gained confidence in her athletic abilities in school, Elodie next entered the competitive club volleyball league of Ontario, and eventually made the University of Toronto women's volleyball varsity team. The recognition and rewards that Elodie received for her athleticism supported a key tenet of modern sport: meritocracy. As one of the only non-white participants in the Ontario University Athletics' (OUA) volleyball circuit, Elodie represented an exception to the norm. Through her athletic performance, Elodie earned a starting

[9] Bruce Kidd, "Muscular Christianity and Value-Centered Sport: The Legacy of Tom Brown in Canada," *Sport in Society* 16, no. 4 (May 2013): 405-15, https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2013.785752. In 2003, the passage of the Physical Activity and Sport Act increased commitment to high performance as well as accessibility to sport for underserved communities.

position on the University of Toronto team. She also earned the Canadian All-Rookie Team award. While Elodie received public accolades based on an apparently color-blind acknowledgement of merit, to those invested in the notion of "meritocracy" in sport, this ideology elided the socioeconomic realities that limited access to the sport and normalized hierarchies within it.

Elodie's investment in her athletic identity shows how the ideology of meritocracy in sport works on and through individuals—particularly diasporic women of color athletes. For Elodie, sport was the dominant narrative; she often foregrounded her athletic identity above the many others she embodied. She chose an athletic identity for herself—an identity, she said, that would not have been available to her in Mauritius. Volleyball provided her an opportunity for civic engagement, leadership, cultural citizenship, and public recognition. It allowed her to participate in dominant culture while representing immigrants and women of color in publicly lauded ways. Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate, the world of competitive women's volleyball also reinscribed hegemonic norms around race, gender, class, and heteronormativity. Elodie's early athletic experiences illustrate the nuanced workings of meritocracy in sport. In this chapter, I trace Elodie's emergence as an indoor volleyball player in Canada to demonstrate how her investment in sport both entangled and served her as a racial minority and recent immigrant.

Volleyball's Overt and Covert Histories

The dominant history of volleyball often sanitizes its raced, gendered, and imperial past. Volleyball organizations promote a historical narrative that represents the sport—past and present—as universal, color-blind, and accessible. Indoor volleyball, while part of the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) umbrella, has a history and cultural norms that differ from beach volleyball; however, most beach volleyball players start out playing indoors where they

develop fundamental skills. The sport's overt and covert histories parallel this chapter's assertion that sport is a site that both reinscribes hegemonic ideals *and* provides opportunity to challenge them. While the volleyball that Elodie played in the 1990s and 2000s differed from the game's earlier iterations, I trace its history to situate Elodie and her contemporaries within a sport with a unique history of nation-building, imperialism in the Pacific, and global expansion.

The FIVB and other volleyball governing bodies, such as Volleyball Canada, promote similar histories of volleyball that trace the sport's inception back to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Holyoke, Massachusetts, but do not discuss the evangelical and masculinist sporting contexts that it came out of during the turn of the twentieth century. In 1895, a young American named William G. Morgan invented volleyball.[10] At the time, Morgan had recently become the director of the YMCA in Holyoke, Massachusetts, charged with the development and direction of exercise programs and sport classes for male adults. Morgan himself was under the tutelage of Dr. Luther Hasley Gulick—a contemporary of Theodore Roosevelt. A champion of muscular Christianity, Morgan was personally and professionally inspired by Roosevelt's infamous speech, "The Strenuous Life."[11] In the speech, Roosevelt touted the benefits of physical activity, particularly team sports, as a preventative measure against "listlessness," "urban decay," and an "unmanly" urban lifestyle.[12] Roosevelt's speech reflected the growing concern that modern man was "overcivilized" and that the "feminizing" effects of American Protestantism threatened the health of the nation. Progressive reformers were enthusiastic advocates of a more strenuous life for men and viewed amateur sport as a

[10] The sport was originally called "mintonette."
[11] Gulick was director of the professional physical education training school and also executive director of the department of physical education of the International Committee of YMCA's.
[12] The late nineteenth-century rhetoric of sport and masculinity is most commonly connected to Theodore Roosevelt and his promotion of football.

positive avenue to build character and support Protestant, Victorian, and middle-class values. Muscular Christians argued that the strength and character of both individuals and the nation required the cultivation of spirituality and the body.[13] The physical activity programs of the YMCA during this time focused on attracting middle- to upper-class young men, and to a lesser degree, middle-class Protestant women.[14] Thus, organized amateur sport had the potential to form good character only among this focused demographic.

Gulick, like Roosevelt, engaged in rhetoric about urban decay, emphasized Anglo-Saxon manliness, and touted physical activity and team sport to elicit masculine virility.[15] Gulickian logic represented the female athlete as a contradiction in terms, and female athletics as a threat to femininity.[16] In a similar vein, whiteness was inherently tied to this logic. Dominant social views pronounced non-Anglo-Saxons incapable of the sophistication and skills required for team sports. The definition of a worthy athletic subject mirrored turn-of-the-century concerns over the boundaries of manhood and womanhood in the context of increasing urbanization. In the FIVB's history, volleyball developed from a need for a "less violent and less intense alternative [to basketball] for the older members." This FIVB description detaches itself from the social and religious politics in the development of the sport by failing to describe the broader investment in developing sport for American middle-class males at the time.

The evolution of volleyball into its modern form took place overseas and in imperial contexts—details that are largely erased from its official histories. In the conventional history, the YMCA introduced the game to Canada—its first international destination—in 1900 to

[13] Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports,* 6th ed. (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 25.
[14] Rader, 26.
[15] Alex M. Mobley, "The Secret History of Volleyball" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 44.
[16] Mobley, 42.

YMCA branches in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal.[17] Within a decade, the YMCA brought the sport to the Philippines, China, Japan, Burma, India, Mexico, and then to parts of South America, Europe and Africa.[18] In addition to using the sport to physically engage Americans abroad,[19] volleyball was also introduced to U.S. imperial subjects as a vehicle of imperial education and benevolent sociability.[20] But the Filipino's success with volleyball challenged the colonial assumption that non-Anglo-Saxons lacked the sophistication needed for team sports. Examining volleyball in the Philippines, Alex Mobley illustrates how Philippine subjects developed two modern-day attributes of the game in response to racially imposed rules on Filipino players: the three-touch rule and the spike. In looking at the notes of International YMCA director Elwood S. Brown, Mobley uncovers that the colonizers regarded Filipino players as "sneaky" and "unsportsmanlike" compared to the "straightforward" and "sportsmanlike" Americans.[21] This racial logic justified a three-touch limit on the Filipino side, while it permitted unlimited contact on the American side. To remain competitive, the Filipino players developed the "bomba" or spike, a fundamental offensive strategy in modern volleyball.[22] The FIVB history, however, omits mention of both the development of the three-touch rule and evolution of the spike, and merely states that "in 1922 the maximum number of authorized contacts with the ball was fixed at three."[23]

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[17] Lorne Sawula, "Volleyball," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia,* April 03, 2015, http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/volleyball/.
[18] "Volleyball History," Fédération Internationale de Volleyball*,* accessed August 20, 2016, http://www.fivb.org/en/volleyball/History.asp.
[19] By design, the sport's adaptability to multiple playing surfaces and locations made it an ideal physical activity to take abroad for American servicemen and eventually as an imperial tool to "benevolently" educate colonial subjects.
[20] Mobley, "Secret History of Volleyball," 54. Mobley reexamines the history of volleyball in the Pacific (through the colonizer's own documented observations).
[21] In 1911, the Philippine Bureau of Education requested Brown to introduce volleyball to Filipino government employees at Baguio. Brown's initial assignment was to provide physical education to Americans in colonial service. Mobley, 78.
[22] Mobley, 79.
[23] Fédération Internationale de Volleyball, "Volleyball History."

By the early twentieth-century, volleyball had already become quite popular in North America, with an estimated reach of two hundred thousand players.[24] In 1916, the YMCA convinced the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to promote the sport, resulting in its rapid growth among young college students.[25] When a formalized instruction manual for the game surfaced during the interwar years, it emphasized etiquette between matches through a behavioral scale that rated players on categories such as bragging, hogging the ball, hurting another's feelings, and the ability to make friends.[26] As a popular leisure sport with a reputation as "less strenuous" and more inclusive, it was slower to be incorporated into major competitions, including the Olympics. Ironically, the failure to view volleyball as a serious athletic competition opened opportunities for women's participation in team sport: traditionally a male realm.[27]

The FIVB's history of volleyball stops in the 1930s, with only a brief reference to the expansion of the sport into a rigorous international game. This leaves the impression that the rules, style of play, and social significance of the sport persisted over time relatively unchanged. Yet, much has happened since. Despite lacking credibility as a "serious" sport, volleyball became globally institutionalized in the first half of the twentieth century. The FIVB was founded in 1947, and volleyball was officially accepted in the Olympics during the 1964 Tokyo Games, where the sport took another modern-day turn. These games were the first to be televised internationally via satellite. During the Tokyo Games, the standard ball changed to one with a rubber bladder and leather outside, similar to the balls used today.

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[24] 70,000 YMCA (boys, young men, and older men); 50,000 YWCA (girls and women); 25,000 in schools (boys and girls); and 10,000 in colleges (young men).
[25] Fédération Internationale de Volleyball, "Volleyball History."
[26] Mobley, "Secret History of Volleyball," 53. Mobley looks at YMCA Physical director Robert E. Levega's manual *Volleyball: A Man's Game* (1933) that was presumably in response to Florida College State Director of physical education, Katherine W. Montgomery's manual, *Volleyball for Women* (1928).
[27] Mobley, 53-54.

Beyond the sport's increase in popularity and changes to the game's equipment, during the Tokyo Olympics, the Japanese women's volleyball team thrived. Its success incited racially charged coverage of the team by U.S. media. The Japanese had a faster-paced and revolutionary style of play such as the diving defensive roll, the float serve, as well as the "time differential attack" and the "quick" introduced by Japanese coach Yasutaka Mastudaira.[28] As a result of these innovations, Japanese women took the gold, and the men took the bronze at the 1964 Olympics. *Life* and *Sports Illustrated* magazines among other popular American publications labeled the Japanese women's team as the "Witches of the Orient" and described the team's rolling defensive dives, inspired by Judo's *kaiten reshiibu*, as graceless and masochistic.[29] The dynamic hitting formations, overhead float serves, and rolling dives remain pillars in contemporary volleyball. Like the Filipinos' contributions in developing the modern day "spike," the Japanese innovations received scant acknowledgement in the mainstream historiography of the sport.[30]

After World War II, women in sport challenged U.S. Cold War gender roles.[31] At the highest international levels for volleyball, American women trailed behind the more complex and competitive Asian style of play because American women were expected to conform to non-athletic versions of femininity. The sport had yet to be seen as non-threatening to American standards of femininity.[32] White, middle-class, suburban housewives embodied a feminine ideal

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[28] "Yasutaka Matsudaira," International Volleyball Hall of Fame (website), accessed November 21, 2016, http://www.volleyhall.org/yasutaka-matsudaira.html. Hirofumi Daimatsu was the coach for women's team. He was notorious for his militant style.

[29] Helen Mcnaughtan, "The Oriental Witches: Women, Volleyball and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics," *Sport in History* 34, no. 1 (February 2014): 137.

[30] Mobley, "Secret History of Volleyball," 124.

[31] 1960s saw increased efforts to engage women and girls in sports as part of Cold War politics. Susan J. Bandy, Gigliola Gori, and Dong Jinxia, "From Women and Sport to Gender and Sport: Transnational, Transdisciplinary, and Intersectional Perspectives," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 5 (2012): 667-668.

[32] Mobley, 122. Mobley argues this was evident in the American journalists' surprise at the Japanese women.

from which women of color were largely excluded. Black American women, subject to discrimination on virtually every front, could nonetheless more easily inhabit the role of the athlete and participate in traditionally masculine events like track and basketball. Black women were subjected to racialized meanings of womanhood that barred them from the privileges and constraints of white middle-class femininity.[33] In a similar way that racial logic was used to explain the success of Japanese women's volleyball, black bodies were naturalized as physically "gifted" to explain the success of black American women in track at the Olympics.[34]

While the game itself remained relatively unchanged through the second half of the twentieth century, its participants and spectatorship, particularly at the collegiate level, shifted significantly from the 1970s, with dramatic implications for norms of gender and sexuality. A by-product of the 1972 Title IX of the Education Amendments Act increased women's and girls' participation in sport and fitness—domains that previously had been reserved for males.[35] Pat Griffin argues that during this transition the institutional restrictions on women in sport were imbued with fears about the boundaries of women's proper sphere and their (hetero)sexual availability.[36] Simultaneously, during this time, network television began its fierce competition for the airing rights to college matches, professional sports, and the Olympic Games. Athletics emerged as a site of advertising and consumption.[37] For women in sport, this provided both personal and economic opportunities. At the same time, the sport sexualized the bodies of female

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[33] Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 221.
[34] Bass, 221.
[35] Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 254. Title IX states that, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. A § 1681 (1972).
[36] Pat Griffin, *Strong Women: Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sports* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics, 1998), 78.
[37] Rader, *American Sports*, 250.

athletes for public display linked to their commercialization. Radical feminists charged female athletes with complicity in upholding heterosexist visions of femininity that trivialized their athletic achievement. Postfeminist writers, by contrast, touted the opportunity for women athletes to reclaim their bodies.[38] Collegiate women's volleyball received notable academic and public attention within this debate, largely centered on the revealing uniforms and excessive make up worn by athletes.

The turn of the millennium saw another significant change in the rules and culture of the sport toward increased spectatorship and commercialization. Volleyball had changed significantly from Morgan's original vision, evolving beyond Gulickian ideals of gendered and raced athletic subjects. From 1998 through 2001, the scoring system changed from side-out scoring to a rally point system with two built-in timeouts.[39] The server now had a time limit and only one toss to serve the ball over the net. Furthermore, the served ball was now allowed to touch or graze the net. These changes sped up the game and made it more exciting and dynamic for spectators, while accommodating television broadcasts punctuated by commercial breaks. Furthermore, volleyball's governing bodies created a new position along with caps on substitutions and timeouts. The FIVB, NCAA, Volleyball Canada, and other governing bodies of volleyball implemented the *libero*—Italian for "free"—in 1998. The *libero* is a defensive specialist who can freely swap in and out of the back row, usually with "middle position" players who are often not as quick or nimble.[40] The introduction of the *libero* marked a significant shift

[38] Victoria Carty "Textual Portrayals of Female Athletes: Liberation or Nuanced Forms of Patriarchy?," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 26, no. 2 (2005): 132-72.
[39] Side-out scoring is when points can only be gained by the team who has possession of the serve. In other words, the team that serves must win the play to earn a point. In rally point scoring, whichever team wins the play, earns a point, regardless of who served the ball.
[40] A few years later the NCAA added their own variations to these rules surrounding the libero and scoring system.

in the game toward more specialization of players and positions, which opened opportunities for Asian players to occupy *libero*.[41]

Navigating Ontario Club Volleyball

Geography of Otherness

Volleyball for Elodie represented a complex nexus of opportunity and Othering.[42] During the 1990s, competitive indoor volleyball in Ontario was predominantly a white middle-class sport. Although racial diversity in the sport increased over time, in the mid-1990s when Elodie participated in the Ontario Volleyball Association (OVA), she remembered being one of the few players of color in the league:

> So, the non-white players are predominantly black. I think I only saw one other Asian person when we first started out or they'd be mixed [race]. And the older Scarborough Solars team, had one [non-white] player who was a setter and an outside hitter. On our team the other black player was a middle. One team that really stood out to me as a pretty diverse team as well was the Scarborough Titans.[43]

Playing club volleyball in the OVA was an abrupt introduction to "another Canada"—one that exposed Elodie's vulnerabilities as a racial and economic outsider to the sport and the nation. The league presented a stark contrast to her athletic involvement at her high school—Harbord Collegiate Institute. Her teammates at Harbord reflected the demographics of a downtown Toronto high school that bordered Little Portugal to the

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[41] As we see in today's game players are groomed to be blocking, serving, hitting, and defending specialists to enter the game at crucial moments. Similarly, the statistics most commonly collected about the players are their blocks, kills, ace serves, passes, and digs.

[42] She entered the competitive "mainstream" volleyball context with preexisting ideals of Canadian athleticism constructed through the country's national sport and iconic pastime: hockey. Andreas Krebs argues that in Canada hockey makes White masculinity a reference point for all others and thus reproduces colonial relationships. Through hockey, she explains, Whiteness, masculinity, and liberal individualism are constructed as essential to Canadian life. While Canadians do not revere girls' and women's volleyball with the same fervor, volleyball's standards and norms are informed by similar hegemonic notions of gender, class, and Whiteness. Andreas Krebs, "Hockey and the Reproduction of Colonialism in Canada," in Joseph, Darnell, and Nakamura, *Race and Sport*, 81.

[43] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, October 17, 2016.

south, Korea Town to the north, Chinatown to the east, and a nearby neighborhood that housed many students and professionals from the University of Toronto. In high school, Elodie captained the junior and senior volleyball teams, led her team to victory at the city championship (junior team), won athlete of the year every year, and was voted the most likely to become an Olympian. Prior to the OVA, Elodie's school athletics represented culturally familiar contexts, but less "serious" athletics than the Ontario club league. Club volleyball required more resources, access to facilities, and extracurricular time to participate. Elodie's reflection on geographic inaccessibility of competitive volleyball informed her understanding of racial and class disparities in the sport. Furthermore, her experiences on two separate OVA teams (one more competitive than the other) exposed her to how athletes deployed the sport's heteronormative standards of femininity to increase perceptions of their athletic legitimacy.

Until Elodie participated in the OVA, she lived largely within the spatial and cultural boundaries of a specific ethnic community. Ogden Elementary Public School, Lord Lansdowne Junior High School, and Harbord Collegiate Institute all existed within a two-mile radius from each other and served a large Chinese immigrant population due to their proximity to Chinatown. Elodie was a member of the ethnic majority at each of these schools. Despite linguistic differences, over time she connected with other Chinese immigrant students through shared cultural values and experiences, including food and traditional celebrations. Although Elodie was born and raised in Mauritius, in these school contexts her ethnic Chinese identity, rather than her nationality, took precedence. In sport, as with other institutions, issues of race and ethnicity are often inseparable from that of class. Toronto, its suburbs, and the southern Ontario region were segregated along

lines of race and class—divisions reflected in the geography of the OVA during Elodie's time.

Figure 2.1 Harbord Collegiate's junior volleyball team, 2000. Elodie in jersey no. 15 (center back), Yuka in jersey no. 17 (far right). (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Unlike in her school contexts, white and middle-class individuals dominated membership in club volleyball. This club setting challenged Elodie's sense of social and athletic belonging along the lines of race, class, and immigrancy underscored by geography. Like many who grew up in Toronto's downtown core, Elodie did not drive, nor did her family have the means to purchase a second car with its added expenses, particularly for an activity to which Elodie's parents had only reluctantly assented. Scarborough, one of Toronto's suburban communities, was one of the few clubs accessible to those in the city with its higher concentration of immigrant and mixed-

income residents.[44] A clear majority of OVA tournaments took place outside of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in rural parts of southern Ontario and in predominantly white communities. This further reduced the likelihood that players from teams other than Scarborough would include non-white players.

In Elodie's experience, racial and economic disparities in the OVA existed due to the absence of club opportunities for inner city kids. For the two short years that Elodie participated in the OVA, she competed for two separate clubs: C.S. Azzuri and Scarborough Solars. Elodie first played for C.S. Azzuri in grade nine. I also played for this club with her. At the time, the club was new and relatively unknown. It was also the only club in the junior OVA league in Toronto proper. It operated out of a country club that served a middle- and upper-class Italian community in the northwestern edge of the city, roughly an hour commute from Harbord. Elodie and I would travel directly to practice two to three times a week after school and participate in tournaments on weekends. At competitions Elodie recalled feeling unwelcome, and an outsider:

> Most tournaments are outside the city. So, just going to these tournaments I realized that volleyball in Ontario is played by predominantly white people. Again, remembering the incident in Stratford, feeling like we were a minority there and vaguely remembering an incident with another team where there were words being exchanged. I can't remember exactly what was said but I remembered that [I] just didn't feel welcomed in that tournament in Stratford.[45]

I was also at that tournament in Stratford, Ontario and this incident cemented in my mind as well. In this interview, Elodie and I collectively stitched together this event in our memories. I had forgotten that the tournament had taken place in Stratford but I retained the vivid and painful memory that members of the other team had thrown food at us. Parents from that team

[44] In 1998 five municipalities surrounding Toronto amalgamated with the city to become the greater Toronto area. This amalgamation included the suburban community, Scarborough. Virtually no OVA club teams existed in downtown Toronto.
[45] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.

confronted us, accusing us of "inner city" behavior that tainted the "wholesomeness" of the league, even though their children had assaulted us, unprovoked. While Elodie remembers feeling unwelcome in Stratford, I distinctly remember feeling the absence of our parents who were unable to accompany us to the tournament. At that moment, we felt branded not only as "inner city" kids, but also stigmatized as neglected and poor.[46]

In the OVA league, Elodie's victories shielded her against discrimination, but losing left her vulnerable to racial and ethnic harassment. Our team, C.S. Azzurri, included one other Asian player. The remaining players were children of Italian immigrants, two or more generations removed. During our matches, opposing teams would mock our predominantly Italian team, cheering "ehhh" with their fingers turned up waving them the air—their stereotypical rendition of Italianness. This ethnic mockery was not lost on any of the players. As a non-winning team from the city, C.S. Azzuri was subject to ethnicity-based discrimination from players and parents in ways other non-winning, non-urban, but predominantly white teams, did not endure. While no one said directly that our team was not welcome in the league, the harassment on and off the court marked us as outsiders. The lack of sanctions by the OVA officials, referees, and parents for the players' publicly racist behavior failed to acknowledge racism in the sport, or worse fostered it. Our coach simply asked us to rise above it all.[47]

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[46] Our parents did not attend partly because they sometimes worked on the weekends or had their own obligations, but also because we were latchkey kids and were expected to be quite independent and figure out how to function and travel on our own. We were expected to prioritize school over sports. Sports were just a bonus *if* school checked out. Furthermore, helicopter parenting—intense parental involvement in their children's activities—had not yet become popular.

[47] Current OVA code of conduct specifies that individuals in the league must demonstrate respect for others regardless of physical characteristics, athletic ability, gender, ancestry, color, ethnic or racial origin, nationality, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, or economic status among others [para. 7[a][i]). It also urges players to refrain from harassment of any kind including but not limited to racism or engage in "condescending or patronizing behavior intended to undermine self-esteem" (para. 7[b][v]). Ontario Volleyball Association, "Code of Conduct," revised October 2015, http://www.ontariovolleyball.org/sites/default/files/Ontario%20Volleyball%20Association%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Passed%20Oct%202015.pdf.

Conversely, merit protected successful teams—including those with some racial diversity—from racial taunting. After Elodie's first year in the OVA league, she moved on to a more established and competitive team in the GTA: the Scarborough Solars. Elodie did not recall feeling self-conscious about her race on this more diverse team, nor was this team publicly mocked. The Solars' consistently strong performances in tournaments ensured the team's place in the league.[48] Yet even merit had limited protective value since the ideal of merit was itself entwined with racial privilege. In order for Elodie and her diverse teammates to prove their legitimacy, they had to excel—and excellence depended, in part, upon training and access. The normalized culture of whiteness in the OVA during the 1990s meant that racially marked players did not have the benefit of generic belonging compared to their white counterparts.

Elodie's explanation of why volleyball lacked non-white players when she was competing in the 1990s and early 2000s highlighted geographic, cultural, and economic obstacles to participation:

> Well, back in the day when I was playing, it was definitely because of resources. You know my parents sacrificed. You had to pay to play club. They're kind of unusual in terms of letting me go play club [and] travel to Scarborough on the TTC [public transportation] for an hour and a half. Most parents would be like, "No, that's too far, that's taking away from your school work." They did give me a condition, like if my marks went down then I wouldn't be able to play, which is probably why I didn't play the year after 'cause I dropped ten percent in my overall grade. I think in the Chinese culture, that's a huge thing. Sports is just not high on the list of importance. With regards to raising your child, school is first and foremost…and then music probably, and you know just trying to be a well-rounded person…I had to go and try to find a way myself, whereas all the other athletes and players I know, their parents would drop them off, but my parents had to work. So, even going to the tournaments, I'd always have to hitch a ride with other people's parents or people who knew how to drive.[49]

[48] The Solars team was considered more racially diverse by OVA standards since they had noticeably more people of color playing; however, the majority of the team's players were still non-ethnic whites.
[49] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.

The distance to club practices represented a physical and economic barrier that underscored the constraints of extracurricular participation for working-class families who were, in addition, often reluctant to invest in their children's extracurricular activities without obvious payoff. Elodie also attributed her parents' resistance to her OVA participation to Chinese immigrant cultural norms. She described her parents as "unusual" for permitting her to play at all, explaining that Chinese parents generally viewed sports as a low priority compared to school and even music. In Elodie's case, too, participation depended upon retaining her good grades.

In recounting this history, Elodie evoked the narrative of personal and immigrant family sacrifice in overcoming hurdles to participation, validating her belief in meritocracy. Participation in extracurricular activities required extra income and a flexible lifestyle. Her statement, "You had to pay to play club," not only referred to the club dues and tournament entry fees, but also the cost of uniforms, athletic gear, and transportation.[50] Elodie compared her parents, "who had to work," with her teammates' parents, who "would drop them off." While Elodie was forced to "try to find a way" herself to practice on school nights, she did not criticize her parents; rather, she recalled this memory through her parents' sacrifices as immigrants. In recounting these barriers through the lens of sacrifice, Elodie drew upon a heavily utilized narrative within the rhetoric of meritocracy: the overcoming of obstacles through individual grit and sacrifice.

Physicality and Looking the Part

Elodie's participation in club volleyball also required other kinds of adjustments and sacrifices. Volleyball (and beach volleyball) not only has a distinct racial profile, in recent decades it also sports a distinct gendered beauty aesthetic. That aesthetic, naturalized as "part of

[50] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.

the game," consumes players' time and can undermine their self-esteem. When Elodie was playing in the OVA, the model body was white, heterosexual, tall, and slender—physical characteristics that conferred legitimacy as a volleyball player. Although winning legitimized Elodie's belonging in the league, she was expected to look the part. While Elodie felt more at home on a racially diverse and winning team (Solars), she faced insecurities about other aspects of her physicality:

> I just remember at Solars we had these BRIGHT red tights. They were awful. (Laugh.) It was very nylon and slippery too, so it wasn't fun to play in. They weren't comfortable. I mean I'm not the biggest fan of tights. They didn't make me feel comfortable. I think I usually practiced in regular shorts, but because we had to wear the tights in the games, I'd wear tights in the game. Then you just get used to it. It becomes the norm.[51]

Elodie, as a self-proclaimed "tomboy," did not naturally embrace the sexualized aesthetics of women's volleyball.[52] Other than the compulsory uniform, she did not wear makeup at matches or wear short tights outside of competition. Despite initial discomfort with the bright red tights, she claimed to "get used to it." Wearing the revealing uniform became the norm—a naturalized part of playing the game.

Even when female athletes perform exceptionally well, they face suspicion and mistrust for intruding on the masculine domain of sport. Often represented as overly masculine or "butch," they remain vulnerable to homophobia. Women in traditionally male sports face particular pressure to ascribe to heteronormative aesthetics. For instance, the Amateur International Boxing Association suggested that women boxers competing for the first time in

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[51] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.

[52] The current uniform requirement for the OVA junior level does not specify the type of shorts players must wear (e.g. loose, tight, length, etc.) However, players within a team must wear shorts and jerseys of the same color and style. Similarly, the FIVB rule states that uniforms (shorts, jersey, and socks) must match in color and style (Rule 4.3.1). Fédération International de Volleyball, "Official Volleyball Rules 2017-2020," http://www.fivb.org/EN/Refereeing-Rules/documents/FIVB-Volleyball_Rules_2017-2020-EN-v04.pdf. Thus, the spandex shorts are a cultural phenomenon within the sport among female players, not a sanctioned rule.

the London 2012 Olympics should wear a skirt to differentiate themselves from male competitors.[53] Furthermore, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association came under fire before the 2015 women's World Cup for continuing the practice of sex verification whereby select women underwent physical, chromosomal, and other arbitrary testing to prove that they were female.[54] Feminist scholars have interpreted female athletes' enactments of an exaggerated femininity on and off the court as a means to counter the charge of lesbianism or "passing" as a woman. Women's indoor and beach volleyball are particularly aggressive in promoting what Griffin calls "heterosexy"—a display of skin to construct sexy female bodies for heteronormative male consumption.[55] In the high school and junior OVA leagues, Elodie and I often witnessed and enacted this feminization and infantalization of female volleyball players. In addition to the compulsory uniforms, many athletes adorned their long-haired ponytails with ribbons of team colors, considered inseparable from team building and cohesion.

Although volleyball does not have an official aesthetic component or weight requirement built into the competition—as does figure skating, gymnastics or dance—the sport is not immune to the pressures of body shaming. These pressures weigh most heavily on athletes who are viewed as outsiders to the sport.[56] As Elodie described, she did not feel comfortable in tight shorts, but she nonetheless accepted them as "the norm":

> The one thing I think with Solars that I felt sort of insecure about, was my body image more than anything. During that time, I played more volleyball than any other time in my life…which kind of led to injury. That's when I started to have knee problems and [would get] comments from coaches like, "I think you need to lose weight" and things like that with regards to my knee issues. That's what I

[53] "Female Boxers Will Not Be Forced to Wear Skirts at the Olympics," *BBC,* March 2, 2012, http://www.bbc.com/sport/boxing/17229496.
[54] Proponents of this testing argue that men are physiologically superior to women and thus have an advantage in sport.
[55] Griffin, *Strong Women*, 75.
[56] Katharina Lindner, "Women's Boxing at the 2012 Olympics: Gender Trouble?," *Feminist Media Studies* 12, no. 3 (September 2012): 464–67.

> think started the "there's something wrong with my weight" consciousness of my body.[57]

When Elodie was first asked to lose weight, she was fifteen years old. By this point in the history of female volleyball, the sport had already become a hypersexualized game. The standard uniform in the mid-1990s included short spandex tights and a tee shirt tucked into the shorts. This was far from the last time Elodie was asked to lose weight or felt self-conscious about her body image in athletic settings. In women's sports, weight loss was often veiled behind a false promise of increased performance. In a recent study of 603 elite female athletes, sixty-seven percent of them were told by coaches to lose weight.[58] Female athletes in aesthetic sports are especially vulnerable to developing eating disorders. Although women in team sports without an official aesthetic component are less susceptible to disordered eating than are those in aesthetic sports, the form-fitting uniform of women's volleyball increases the likelihood that players will compare their size and weight, and feel anxious about the judgment of teammates and coaches.[59]

By the time that Elodie entered club volleyball, the aesthetic norms of the sport, including hypersexualized spandex shorts, subtly policed the bodies of players who didn't "fit in," forcing female volleyball participants to "look the part" to belong in competition. Since Asian bodies, in particular, were often stereotyped as unathletic, Elodie's race marked her as an "unnatural" participant despite her athletic merits. For Elodie, from the age of fifteen onward, the sport's hypersexualized uniform offered a pathway to help normalize her belonging. Strikingly, neither when she entered the league nor later in her university career did she vocalize her objection to the uniform. Elodie acquiesced to the sport's uniform as part of the norm because, I argue, the

[57] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.
[58] Justine J. Reel, ed., *Eating Disorders: An Encyclopedia of Causes, Treatment, and Prevention* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2013), 12.
[59] Reel, 440.

stakes of being further marked as an outsider were much higher for her as one of the only racial minorities in the league. Investing effort in her own heterosexiness to "look the part" protected Elodie against racist assumptions that she was an "unnatural" participant. It also reinforced her identity as a competent and strong competitor. These racialized, gendered, and heterosexist norms continued to challenge her athletic identity as she moved into the North American Chinese volleyball and university leagues.

North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament

Founded in the 1930s, the North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament (NACIVT) emerged shortly after the 1924 Immigration Act that closed the door to most immigration from Asia and declared Asians ineligible for citizenship.[60] Both Canada and the U.S. have systemically excluded Asians through the Chinese Immigration Act (1923) and the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882). Excluded groups have contested legal discrimination on multiple fronts, including athletics. Initially, the NACIVT league provided a means for Chinese laundry workers to maintain a sense of community and a space for recreation amidst the oppressive nature of their labor and racialized existence in the United States.[61] Yuka Nakamura asserts that in this context, the claim to belonging through this league was an empowering act.[62] Subsequently, the league expanded into a large North American competition rooted in Chinatowns across many large American cities.[63] At the time of Elodie's participation from the

[60] The league is also known as 9-man volleyball or Chinese volleyball.
[61] "History," 69th Annual North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament, accessed January 14, 2017, http://dc.nacivt.com/about/history/.
[62] Yuka Nakamura, "Rethinking Identity Politics: The Multiple Attachments of an 'Exclusive' Sport Organization," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 33, no. 2 (June 2016): 149.
[63] Participating cities include New York, D.C., Boston, Montreal, Toronto, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and, more recently, Las Vegas and Florida (2017).

mid-1990s to the early 2000s, players were primarily Chinese with some members of East Asian or Southeast Asian descent.[64]

While sport can be a site that reinscribes inequalities, it can also be a path to cultural citizenship. In North America, people of Asian ancestry have long been regarded as outsiders to the national body. The ban on Chinese women's immigration during the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century made it impossible for most Chinese men to marry, have a family, and forge roots. Japanese internment during World War II, the representation of Chinatowns as contaminated and immoral, and the marking of Asians as diseased during the SARS crisis, all speak to the legacy of Asian exclusion in both the U.S. and Canada.[65] Cultural citizenship rests upon the principle that in plural societies, citizens have the right to be different, to belong, and to participate in democratic activities. It asserts that in a democracy, differences such as race, religion, class, gender, and sexual orientation should not render citizens less equal or inferior to others.[66] Cultural citizenship implies the ability of non-dominant groups and individuals to engage in cultural practices and claim rights to full societal membership. The NACIVT league participants used Canadian and American Chinatowns to claim spaces within these respective countries and to assert their belonging and cultural citizenship.[67] Nakamura's ethnographic work on this league illuminates the significance of claiming Chinatown as home and rooting participants' history firmly with the U.S. and Canada, disrupting the home-and-away binary and

[64] Court-time priority is given to those who are Chinese where two-thirds of those actively playing on the court must be "full Chinese." Other non-Chinese, but Asian players can include those with ancestry from: Myanmar, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.
[65] Nakamura, "Rethinking Identity Politics," 149.
[66] Renato Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1994): 402.
[67] Yuka Nakamura, "Playing in Chinatown: A Critical Discussion of the Nation/Sport/Citizen Triad," in Joseph, Darnell, and Nakamura, *Race and Sport*, 222.

the forever immigrant trope ubiquitous in White colonized spaces.[68] Although the history of the Chinese league began on the margins of sporting norms in North America, Nakamura warns against viewing the league as non-competitive or isolated from the mainstream leagues. She also argues that the NACVIT and mainstream leagues share a flow of participants (players, coaches, referees, organizers).[69]

In the summer of 1998, Elodie joined the NACIVT league. That same year Elodie quit the OVA at her parents' insistence. Weekday evening commutes on public transportation and the time spent traveling great distances to competitions had taken a toll on her grades.[70] Nonetheless, Elodie continued to play volleyball in her school league, and continued to develop her skill during the summers by joining a Toronto-based NACIVT club called Toronto Connex. This Chinese volleyball league, as the name would suggest, did not bar or erase her ethnicity; rather, it was a prerequisite to league membership and provided concrete privileges such as more playing time in matches. Through the NACIVT organization, Elodie was able to embrace both her racial and athletic identities. This league provided Elodie with role models with whom she could identify through athleticism and a shared ethnicity. Lisa Lowe argues that the law, schools, churches, community organizations, and family—sites through which immigrants are "naturalized" as "citizens" or disciplined as foreigners—are also the very sites through which immigrants produce cultural forms that challenge the national disciplinary regime. "In these sites, 'immigrant acts' perform the dialectical unification across difference and critically generate

[68] Nakamura, 224.
[69] Nakamura, "Rethinking Identity Politics," 149. When Elodie was playing in this league there were several NACVIT participants also involved in the mainstream leagues (OVA, OUA, school leagues, etc.) She has observed that since her time, the two types of leagues have increasingly blended.
[70] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.

the new subjects of cultural politics."[71] Elodie's experience in the NACIVT suggests the nuanced manner in which this athletic institution contributed to the emergence of a dynamic immigrant culture.

Elodie entered this long established Chinese community that provided access to a pre-existing cultural and athletic network. When Elodie first joined the league in the summer of 1997, she was unaware of its geographical scope, number of participants, or its cultural significance in the history of diasporic Chinese in North America. Each year, Elodie played in the Canada Day tournament consisting of league members in Toronto, Montreal, and sometimes a few east coast American teams.[72] Each July, she traveled to New York to compete in the "New York Mini," a tournament substantially larger in size that hosted teams from New York, D.C., Boston, Toronto, Montreal, and sometimes Los Angeles. During tournaments on Labor Day weekends, all participating teams from cities with a significant Chinese immigrant population would compete in rotating locations. Until 2014, Labor Day tournaments rotated among New York, Washington, D.C., Boston, Montreal, Toronto, and San Francisco.[73] In Toronto, local tournaments and practices often took place in or near one of the city's two Chinatowns—locations easily accessible by foot or public transit. Geographic inaccessibility was no longer a barrier to Elodie's participation. The practices of the Toronto Connex club—one of the largest and most competitive clubs in the league—often took place in public school gyms downtown or outdoor tennis courts near the city's Chinatowns.[74]

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[71] Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 173.
[72] Elodie participated in all three tournaments within the season consistently for ten years before participating on an alumni team more sporadically, when it suited her schedule.
[73] In the past decade, Las Vegas, Anaheim, Los Angeles, and Florida have been temporarily added to the rotation.
[74] From 1996 through 2005, Connex Men's A team won the NACIVT championship. In 2005 and 2009, Connex Women's A team won the NACIVT championship. Both Connex teams have consistently placed in the tournament's top brackets since Elodie's time with the club.

Figure 2.2 Connex club at the "New York mini" tournament, 1998.Yuka (front row far left), Elodie (next to Yuka). (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

These relatively familiar and "safe" cultural spaces contributed to Elodie's sense of belonging. Within Connex, Elodie—like many of her teammates—felt a sense of family:

> It's different because family do pretty much everything together, you go eat together. I don't know. It's a different sort of family. It's sort of like comparing an Asian family to like a Canadian family. Like the things you do together are different. But I'm more used to what you do with as an Asian family.[75]

After practices, Elodie would often join the rest of the club members to eat out in nearby Chinese restaurants. She relished these mundane activities for they reminded her of how she socialized with her family around food. When Elodie compared the NACVIT league teammates to her mainstream volleyball peers in the OVA and university league, she labeled them "Canadian family." This demonstrates the way she situated her ethnicity as separate from the Canadian national body. And yet, by virtue of her involvement in this league, she participated in activities

[75] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2016.

that asserted cultural citizenship through claiming spaces within White settler geographies. She also used the analogy of family to express her differing senses of cultural belonging.

Figure 2.3 Connex women's B team at the "New York mini" tournament, 1997. Elodie (far left), Yuka (next to Elodie). (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

For Elodie, this league's proximity to Chinatown—and thus her home—served to develop her volleyball skills while connecting her to a broader community rooted in a history of claims to cultural citizenship. Nonetheless, practices and local tournaments gradually moved toward the suburbs to accommodate the swelling number of participants in the league, locally and globally. Access to downtown gym permits and public courts became increasingly difficult to obtain. Nakamura's research found that participants and tournament booklets represented Chinese-ness in the suburbs as inauthentic, and downtown Chinatown as the place to connect with one's Chinese "roots." While many of the participants themselves lived in or grew up in the suburbs, people of Chinese ancestry viewed Chinatown as an authentic part of their Chinese

identity.[76] However, the gentrification of inner city Chinatowns, threatened to erase these cultural spaces and Elodie's ease of accessibility.[77] The evolving geographic structure of the league venues endangered members' relationship to culturally and historically significant spaces for Chinese North Americans.

North American Chinese Athletic Identities

In the years in which Elodie participated in the NACVIT, the Chinese volleyball league exercised group agency not only through claims to physical spaces within Chinatowns across North America, but also by drawing from a historical narrative that critiqued the Canadian and American governments' systematic legal and symbolic exclusion of Chinese men from the national body. Even today, the league's anti-racist narrative evokes the image of denigrated Chinese laundry workers in New York who overcame adversity despite harsh racism. The tournament website's history section, the *9-Man* documentary, tournament booklets, and oral histories preserve the league's history through the lens of Chinese immigrant narratives. In so doing, it reflects a dominant historiography of Asian Americans that tends to emphasize the Chinese exclusion era and to depict Chinatowns as bachelor communities of Chinese male laborers.[78]

Yet such forms of cultural assertion also run the risk of essentializing the group itself, often along gendered lines.[79] In Elodie's experience, the league's cultural narrative fell into this

[76] Nakamura, "Playing in Chinatown," 222.
[77] Philip Marcelo, "Volleyballers vs. Bulldozers: A Chinatown's History at Stake," *Associated Press*, December 6, 2016. This article centered on the significance of the Reggie Wong Memorial Park to the local Chinese community and NACIVT contingent in Boston threatened by development projects. Major news outlets including U.S.A. Today picked up the story.
[78] Mary Ting Yi Lui, *Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 226.
[79] Monisha Das Gupta's critique of the place-making politics pervasive in the 1980s and 1990s is particularly useful in understanding how anti-racist, culture-based movements have failed to address problems of misogyny, class

trap of obscuring women's experiences. This supports Nakamura's finding that the kind of citizen promoted in the NACIVT was a masculine one. While both male and female tournament athletes staked a claim to national belonging, spectators and players more often celebrated the athleticism and virility of men.[80] Elodie recalled one tournament finals match:

> [T]he women would be playing as intense, if not a more intense final…but all the crowd is surrounding the center court to watch the men. I don't know if you remember old men climbing the fences and trying to get a view of this [men's] finals. And yet we're in the court right next door and had to play over the crowd that was cheering for all the men. And it wasn't until after *they* were done…they would come over and they'd bring over the crowd to cheer for us too…that just always blew my mind in terms of the emphasis on the men's finals versus of the women's finals.[81]

This interview was not the only time Elodie discussed this incident. Over the years, it became one of her dominant memories of gendered hierarchies within the league.

Simultaneously, the rules and rituals of the game reinforced—then as now—a traditional gendered hierarchy. Men play the unique and fast-paced nine-man game while women play conventional "sixes" that closely follow the rules of mainstream indoor volleyball. Prior to each game, the men's teams line up on the backline, bow, and run to the net to shake their opponents' hands—a tradition that the women do not share.[82] Furthermore, Liang's documentary *9-Man* focuses almost exclusively on the men in this league.[83] She explained:

> [Nine-man] is an oral game that is passed on through oral history. It's not a game that has a guide book written…[T]here are some guys in the nine-man league that I know who…don't know how to play anything but nine-man because when they were six years old they started following their uncle to the court and then they started learning how to play nine-man 'cause someone was teaching them and actively trying to include them.[84]

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exploitation, homophobia, and narrow nationalisms. Das Gupta identifies place-making politics as those that focus on access to citizenship and rights based on that citizenship. Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants*.

[80] Nakamura, "Rethinking Identity Politics," 150.

[81] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2016.

[82] The bowing was instituted in the 1990s along with the ethnicity rules.

[83] Ursula Liang, dir., *9-Man*, documentary film (New York, NY: Ursula Liang, 2014), film.

[84] Ursula Liang, in conversation with the author, February 21, 2017.

Liang's decision to focus on the men in the league stemmed from a conviction that the game itself was distinct from the "sixes" women play, as well as her desire to combat stereotypes of Asian men.[85] Starting in the 1990s, leaders in the league attempted to establish women's "9-man" through exhibition and demonstration matches, but their efforts proved unsuccessful. Liang speculates that the shorter life cycle of women's participation restricted clubs' ability to recruit an adequate number of female players, and prevented women from learning a game that was transmitted primarily through oral history and required years of bonding between players.[86] Consequently, men as the cultural preservers of the league cemented their role in perpetuating the oral histories of diasporic Chinese in North America in the sport through a male lens.

Performance of particular forms of masculinity continue to play a significant role in nine-man, which combats racial stereotyping of the bookish and unathletic Asian body and effeminate Asian man. David Leonard illustrates that the arena of sport tends to uphold black-white racial binaries that render Asian American and Pacific Islander bodies illegible. Through examining the racialized gender constructions of Jeremy Lin and Manti Te'o, Leonard demonstrates how mainstream sporting landscapes can also define, circumscribe, and constrain masculine formations. The invisibility of Asian bodies reifies hegemonic stereotypes that Asian men are fragile, queer, non-normative, feminine, and unathletic.[87] Nakamura asserts that by playing nine-man volleyball in public, specifically in Chinatown, league participants unsettle these racial

[85] As a former sports journalist, she was also aware of "what sells" and what narratives appeal to a wider general audience. Liang also stated that these details informed her editorial choices.
[86] Liang, conversation.
[87] David Leonard, "Lin, Te'o, and Asian American Masculinities," in *Asian American Sporting Cultures,* ed. Stanley I. Thangaraj, Constancio Arnaldo, and Christina B. Chin, (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 224-225.

stereotypes of Asian bodies. In so doing, participants further unsettle the nation/sport/citizen triad and claim cultural citizenship in Canada.[88]

Female participation in the league also had its own unique history that pushed back against gendered and racialized stereotypes of the hypersexualized, passive, and meek female Asian body. Liang argues against comparing the women's participation in the league to the men since the games are completely different and female participation has had its own unique context and legacy:

> [Women] started in the seventies. There were opportunities for women in sports then and they already knew the game. So, the easiest thing to do [was] to put them on a court and have them start playing this game rather than teaching something new.[89]

Liang observed that women joined the league closer to adulthood and remained for only a few years and were thus less likely to form the bonds and commitments required for the nine-man game. Despite these differences, Liang insisted that the women's competitiveness on the court and the physical strength to play the game outdoors and on the cement, challenged dominant constructions of Asian women.[90] Elodie joined the women's NACIVT league two decades after Chinese American women entered the NACIVT space, with the advent of Title IX in the 1970s. She too viewed women in the NACIVT league as role models. She admired their strength and ability, and saw in them athletic possibilities within herself.[91]

Nonetheless, NACIVT excited the most controversy not for the gendered divisions within the league, but rather for its ethnic restrictions on membership. Just a few years prior to Elodie's entry into the league in 1998, the league had instituted a rule that required "full" Chinese memberships for two-thirds of the players on the court. The other third could participate as long

[88] Nakamura, "Playing in Chinatown," 215-16.
[89] Liang, conversation.
[90] Liang, conversation.
[91] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2016.

as they were of East Asian or Southeast Asian descent. For one season in the early 1990s, "illegal" players were required to wear ankle bands to clearly mark themselves as less than one hundred percent Chinese.[92] Those who were not one hundred percent Chinese were called "illegal" players. Elodie recalled inscribing herself as "100% Chinese" on the team roster form. Nakamura argues against the claims that the league is premised on exclusion, asserting that participants foster relationships and attachments—local, regional, and national—beyond their ethnicities.[93] Nonetheless, Elodie emphasized the centrality of Chinese blood quantum—which was recorded next to names of all team rosters—when it came to the actual game:[94]

> [O]nce the competition starts, you kind of use anything that would tear down the team. So, if the other team doesn't have a full sixty percent Chinese [roster] then you'd kind of use that rule against them…It kind of gets ugly, right? 'Cause then you argue who's Chinese and who's not…you center people out for not being Chinese. It gets complicated. It gets messy.[95]

On several occasions, teams asked the referee to verify that at least four of the six players on the court were indeed one hundred percent Chinese. This tactic slowed the game and disrupted the opponents' momentum. If a team was caught for having an unsanctioned number of part-Chinese players, the referee retracted the points earned using this illegal lineup. Even so, teams would sometimes risk an illegal lineup because they lacked sufficient "full" Chinese players, or because it gave them a competitive edge. The tactic of playing non-Chinese or non-"full" Chinese

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[92] Ursula Liang argued that with increasing demographic changes to the Chinese community in the 1990s, the league responded with cultural preservation measures, the two-thirds rule being one of them. Liang participated in this league during the transition to the new rule. For one of the first years of implementation, non-"full" Chinese participants had to wear a brightly colored anklet when playing on the court. Liang recalled that experience with mixed emotions. Ursula Liang, conversation.

[93] Participants had varying degrees of ties to the "homeland" of China, which is shaped by historic ties between the league and the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party of China). Canada acknowledged the "One China Policy" where Taiwan is seen as part of mainland China, whereas the U.S. remains ambiguous about the status of Taiwan. Nakamura, "Rethinking Identity Politics," 151.

[94] Players would self-identify their ethnicity and percentage of that ethnicity. Some players who could "pass" as full Chinese would sometimes jokingly be pressured to write down "100% Chinese" to circumvent the two-thirds rule.

[95] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2016.

ethnicities speaks to an on-going debate about the enforcement, significance, and practicality of the "two-thirds Chinese ethnicity" rule, given changing demographics.[96]

Elodie viewed calling out non-"full" Chinese players as a strategy of the competition. She admitted that it got "messy" but accepted the rule. Players within and outside the league often engage in debates around whether this league is racist since its rules clearly restrict participation based on race and ethnicity. When I asked Elodie, "Is this league racist?" she said:

> Well, talking to a recent student of mine, she says that it's not racist per se because racism can only be dealt up by the White Man. They're the ones who set the norm in society, but it is a prejudicial tournament…I understand the reason why it's come about, as a result of racism toward the Chinese people who wanted to play volleyball. They didn't have access to the gyms and they started the game outside. [They] started to play with a rolled-up piece of clothing and the reason they wanted to keep the rules that way is because, I guess, culture.[97]

Elodie here distanced herself from the league's racial politics and history, using the pronoun "they" rather than "we" to describe its roots. Also, she separated herself from the NACIVT's political history by commenting on the league's identity politics through another person's voice. In so doing, she positioned herself as a "special" guest to the league and its culture, even as she rooted her own sense of belonging in a particular ethnic identity.

Elodie's words provide insight into her personal negotiation with the dominant cultural and masculine narrative about Chinese immigrants in North America. During her participation in and reflections on this league, Elodie neither foregrounded her Mauritian identity nor erased it. Rather than engaging in the league's identity politics, she fondly remembered connecting with

[96] According to Elodie, and my limited six years in the league, this debate publicly resurfaces every few years. For instance, Elodie noticed that questions about the rule, its enforcement, and its significance came up on the NACIVT Facebook group in 2016. However, it is a constant and on-going conversation among and between players. She said that this issue comes up most when teams feel "robbed" and that having non-full Chinese players give teams an unfair advantage.

[97] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2016.

other Chinese Mauritians, as well as Chinese Jamaicans and Chinese Trinidadians over their unique and unconventional Chineseness as "islanders." Yet at the same time Elodie also conceded to the league's underlying racial logic that constructed a hierarchy among various forms of "Chineseness" and privileged "pure" Chinese heritage. Doing so granted clear privileges and athletic opportunities in the league and shielded her from ostracism within an already marginalized ethnic group. In this same conversation, I asked Elodie how she felt about her teammate Nicole's outspoken challenge to the league's definition of Chinese identity that privileged racial bloodline. Nicole argued that blood quantum should not be the primary consideration for membership in the Chinese community or in the league since many mixed-Chinese players such as herself grew up immersed in the Chinatown community and speaking Chinese.[98] Elodie initially agreed that the league should open its rules to consider mixed Chinese players as "legal." When I raised the possibility that some athletes of mixed identity might consider themselves just as Chinese by defining identity through attributes other than blood quantum,[99] Elodie demonstrated that she was aware of the many ways people claimed their ethnic identity:

> [W]hat makes somebody more or less Chinese? Is it by speaking the language? Is it by eating the food? What consists of making somebody more or less Chinese?[100]

Her questions speak to the situatedness of the league's Chinese diasporic group formation that derived from a specific urban, male, Toisan, laundry-worker figure of the early twentieth century. Elodie represented but one of many contemporary diasporic Chinese within the league. While she asked rhetorically what it meant to be "Chinese," she also questioned the utility of

[98] Nicole Ming Fa Sullivan, in conversation with the author, February 23, 2017.
[99] In this conversation I suggested that her teammate could make several cultural claims which many "full" Chinese participants could not. She is Chinese of mixed-race ancestry and speaks Cantonese fluently, was raised by her Chinese grandparents, and grew up in Toronto's east end Chinatown,
[100] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2016.

trying to define "Chinese" in the first place. I also suspect that this part of the conversation may also have raised anxieties about how Elodie had previously been treated as an outsider to the Chinese community via her inability to speak Cantonese, and by being part of the Mauritian diaspora. The NACIVT offered an occasion for Elodie to develop her volleyball skills in the absence of OVA opportunities, within a familiar cultural setting and within a membership structure that privileged Elodie's ethnicity. Yet the North American immigrant history of exclusion and discrimination that provided the league's very *raison d'être* called into question the authenticity of Elodie's own Chinese identity.

While I positioned this conversation within Elodie's unique diasporic subjectivity, her own questions illuminated the concerns over how the group constitutes itself as a group.[101] One of the ways the league attempted to define belonging was through the blood quantum ethnicity rule, but with no formal verification. The rule itself emerged in the early 1990s, which may have signaled anxiety over defining a community in a context of increasing participation, diversity within the group, and an impulse to differentiate the group within a white hegemonic landscape that tends to conflate racialized groups. Although Lily Cho's work focuses on the situatedness of rural Canadian Chinese restaurants, the NACIVT similarly embodies a coalescing of old and new diasporic figures separated by time, class, and history. Its members represent a dynamic community that emerged out of a process of interactions with and outside of their communities.[102] I see the questions Elodie posed less as a call to answer and more as revealing of the dynamism of a diasporic community grappling to hold on to identities while forging new ones.

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[101] Lily Cho, *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 131. Cho's work on Chinese restaurants in rural Canada as a site for Chinese diasporic formation underscores the significance of asking how a diasporic community understands itself.
[102] Cho, 15.

"Real" Volleyball

It was during her tenure in the NACIVT league that Elodie began to develop an athletic identity that prized performance above other attributes. In her reflection on the league's skill level, Elodie highlighted the limitations of entangling race and citizenship with the sport. When I asked Elodie, "What is the difference between NACVIT and mainstream volleyball?" she identified the league as a significant cultural and athletic experience. She likened the culture of the league to her familiarity with Asian familial norms:

> [T]he family dynamics of Asian culture is different was well…[I]n Asian culture you look out for one another and make sure everyone is okay. Like, "Hey you don't have a ride? Come with me." Things like that versus in the Canadian culture, it's a little bit more individualistic. Not that my team mates [at University of Toronto] didn't care about me, it's just that it was shown differently, you know?[103]

Here Elodie distinguished the norms of the NACVIT from the individualist cultural norms of Canada and conflated the Ontario university league with Canadian identity. The two leagues, she explained, fostered different values around caring for teammates. Caring for teammates outside of the matches was an important part of Elodie's cultural experience as an athlete, even though she privileged performance and winning. While Elodie acknowledged that both NACVIT and mainstream volleyball were significant athletic contexts with their own unique cultures, she reflected nostalgically on the culture of NACVIT, even as she perceived the NACVIT as lower caliber than mainstream volleyball.

Elodie also saw the league, particularly Connex and her coaches, as instrumental in her success in making the University of Toronto women's volleyball team. Nonetheless, she highlighted the NACIVT league's inability to produce high-performing athletes consistently since Asians were shorter—a significant disadvantage in the sport. The competitors in NACIVT

[103] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation with the author, October 25, 2016.

ultimately did not measure up to this athletic standard for reasons Elodie initially attributed to lack of ability tied to height bound by racial difference. However, she also attributed the disparate playing levels between the two leagues to an issue of resources:

> I mean, as competitive as some teams are [NACIVT league]—we'll be scouting and game planning—maybe there's a resource thing too. [I]n nine-man you don't have coaches watching game tapes and giving game plans. You know that by experienced players kind of like, "okay serve to that person and pick in this seam or the girl is defending you here…" But at the varsity level, you focus on strategies and you have coaches analyzing games and so that might be a difference too.[104]

And while Elodie insisted that performance and outcome were what ultimately mattered in the game, she acknowledged that resources also impacted outcome. In addition to the limited coaching resources of the NACIVT league, Elodie spoke to the lack of affordability of gym space, the inability to practice daily, and the wide age range of participants, from early teens to grandparents. The prerequisites of the NACIVT and the University league are undeniably different: the former requires players to have Asian ancestry to compete, while the latter holds a skills-based tryout and accepts only a small number of highly talented players.

Elodie regarded the athletes in the NACVIT league who competed at the university or national level as exceptions to the rule—those who overcame their disadvantage through exceptional skill. Elodie was speaking from her history as a decorated university volleyball player, a Mauritian national team player, a beach volleyball Olympian, and a Canadian national championship assistant coach.[105] She viewed performance in the sport as the essence of her athletic identity, even in a context in which race, citizenship, and sport were deliberately bound.

[104] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2016.
[105] It is worth considering that at the time of this discussion, Elodie had just come from a fresh championship win as the assistant coach of the University of Toronto Women's Volleyball Team.

The University of Toronto's Varsity Blues

Elodie's success in making the University of Toronto varsity women's volleyball team seems at first glance to confirm the dominant view of sport as a meritocracy. Her accomplishments on the team and the league served as a redemptive narrative for Elodie in that her hard work and athleticism triumphed despite her identity as an inner-city, Chinese immigrant from a working-class background. Yet despite her success, Elodie's athletic merit could not always shield her from encounters that rendered her an outsider on and off the court. When Elodie took this second shot at "mainstream" volleyball, she reentered a hegemonic context similar to that of the OVA—the same institution that Elodie had abandoned—but one that was even more exclusive. Talented players from the OVA club league often did not make the University of Toronto varsity women's volleyball team. Her presence on the team categorized her as an exceptional success. There she joined the few people of color who had "made it" in the Canadian university league and whom she admired. Whereas the NACIVT league insisted on the inseparability of race and athlete, in the university league in a stark paradigm shift, Elodie's race was deemed irrelevant to the game. While Elodie understood that the culture of volleyball involved far more than just plays and scores, she insisted that, "at the end of the day, it's what happens on the court that counts"—an attractive ideal for an individual often marginalized within the sport.

As a varsity volleyball player, Elodie was legible in ways that challenged racial stereotypes about unathletic Asian bodies, but the dominant culture of the university league, like the OVA, also challenged how she negotiated the intersections of her raced, classed, and gendered identities. Specifically, at the University of Toronto, Asian students were pigeon-holed as wealthy, academically-obsessed representatives of the "model minority," who drove luxury

cars and had little interested in sports. The invisibility of Asian student-athletes particularly in popular sports such as volleyball reinforced these stereotypes, which Elodie contested by her very presence. Elodie was a highly visible player. She was in the starting line up the very first game of her debut season and started through the rest of her five-year career. Awarded Rookie All Canadian, she then served as the co-captain for her last two years, bringing the team to provincial championships. At the time, this recognition came as a genuine surprise to Elodie. She was also the only person of color on her university team through the first four years, and frequently the only person of color playing during matches. "There were a lot more teams" in the OVA than in the OUA, Elodie explained:

> [The OVA] was slightly, like just barely, more diverse than the OUA university league. As long as I can remember, I was the only Asian person on my team, other than coaches…you'll see like one or two black players on other teams but, I just remember I would always get excited if I saw another Asian person.[106]

Over time, Elodie had learned how to cope with being one of the only people of color in competition.[107] Elodie's parents, Hélène and Eddy, shared concerns about their daughter's social exclusion on the team:

> Hélène: At one point I was thinking to myself…what were you [Elodie] doing there? It's all white. It's a very selective group. I always felt like, "how was she able to make it there?" It was all in [God's] plan [laugh].
>
> Eddy: We were afraid that she wouldn't feel welcomed in the team.
>
> Hélène: But I think she was okay.[108]

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[106] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.
[107] On both her Solars and University of Toronto teams there were Chinese Canadian assistant coaches, and all had ties to the Chinese volleyball league. It was not uncommon to see East Asian, particularly Chinese Canadian coaches and referees in Toronto's high school league and a few southern Ontario OVA tournaments. Yuka Nakamura's research also notes the involvement of several NACIVT members in "mainstream" volleyball spaces at various levels., attesting to how the NACIVT league is not an isolated cultural and athletic space.
[108] Hélène Li Yuk Lo and Eddy Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, February 3, 2017.

Hélène's and Eddy's reflections also illustrates the pervasive view that Elodie's presence on the team was an exception to the norm. They observed that women's university volleyball was a predominantly white domain, unfriendly toward racial outsiders even as they exuded pride in their daughter for her admission to this selective and racially homogenous team.

Yet "making it" did not address Elodie's feelings of exclusion. Elodie had to contain her cultural difference in this space that claimed a commitment to diversity and inclusiveness.[109] She felt most self-conscious about her ethnicity in a more intimate context—between teammates—when she brought homemade meals and snacks to practice:

> Elodie: I think it's like trying to explain my lunch or things that I'd bring to eat. Or I don't know, [saying] certain things like, "I can't hang out 'cause I have to go to Chinese New Year." I can't remember specific things in particular but it'll just come up in conversation and I'll have to explain…usually it's around food.
>
> Yuka: Can you give me an example?
>
> Elodie: They were questions like, "What's that?" Or "What's that smell?" Vietnamese buns don't smell that good [laugh].
>
> Yuka: Sure, they do [laugh].
>
> Elodie: I mean to say, like to specific people, it's a different smell. You know, things like that.
>
> Yuka: And how did that make you feel?
>
> Elodie: Self-conscious…I was selective about what I brought. I'd avoid the stinkier foods. It's funny, I mean it's become kind of normal, right? I remember, my mom would be like, "Are you sure you want to bring that? You heat that up, it's going to stink up the room." So, I think we've become accustomed to accommodating the people around us.[110]

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[109] The current OUA constitution makes no mention of diversity or anti-discrimination policies. However, the University of Toronto is a member institution and the university commits to institution-wide equity and diversity, free of harassment and discrimination specifically as defined by the *Ontario Human Rights Code.* University of Toronto Governing Council, "Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Excellence," December 14, 2006, http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppdec142006.pdf.

[110] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.

Unlike the incident years ago in which the opposing team had taunted us and pelted us with food, the exchange above speaks to Elodie's feelings of alienation within her own team. Since she had attended elementary, middle, and high schools with large Chinese Canadian immigrant student populations, Elodie had never before encounter these moments of ethnic self-consciousness over "stinky" food. Her comment, "I mean it's become kind of normal, right?" illustrates how that onus of difference infiltrated Elodie's home. Elodie's ethnic food was also the topic of a private conversation with her mother in which they strategized about how best to accommodate others' uneasiness. Elodie recalled reading bell hook's essay, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" in one of her courses.[111] She said, "I wrestle with that [essay] cause in some ways that's how you want to have people experience your own culture, through doing the things you've grown up knowing, like the food." Not only was Elodie's ethnic food a marker of her outsider status, for Elodie it represented a missed opportunity to have her teammates learn more about her. By contrast, in the NACIVT, Elodie nostalgically remembered "eating *bao* in the morning and grabbing Chinese food for dinner with the club." For Elodie, these experiences around food represented a significant way she identified with a group. Food served as an extension of her ethnicity and a way to integrate that part of her identity in her athletic context, as she did before in the Chinese league. And while Elodie earned her position on the University of Toronto team based on her athletic abilities, incidents around food provided a reminder that her presence was an anomaly.

Throughout this interview Elodie tempered her description of members of the dominant group. She spoke critically about racism only when mediated through other people—in this

[111] bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 23-39.

instance through an academic article. Rather than stating that her white counterparts called attention to her differences, she obfuscated their racial identity, referring to them instead as "specific people" or "the people around us." Only at the end of this particular interview, when pressed to elaborate on what she meant by "norms" and whose "norms," did she hesitantly offer the following explanation:

> Well just coming to realize that [small laugh] it's the White Man that sets the standards and the norms for everything, right? And how everything that we do, we're trying to fit into what is already set as normal.[112]

Her hesitancy to call out the "White Man" as setting problematic standards in the sport suggests that she was not entirely convinced that racism explained the underrepresentation of people of color in mainstream volleyball. While Elodie was aware that racism in volleyball existed, it seemed that in this response, the standards set by the "White Man" had to do with fitting into the culture of the sport rather than exclusion from the game itself.

Although Elodie struggled to pinpoint the operations of systemic racism, she more readily identified gender oppression within the sport. The language and recognition of gender equality was more accessible to Elodie on the women's volleyball team, particularly because the head coach Kristine Drakich was (and continues to be) a staunch feminist who advocated for gender equality in athletic spaces.[113] Elodie recognized the influence of "heterosexiness" in her varsity experience due to the public nature of women's volleyball as a popular spectator sport. The spandex shorts that she had once so reluctantly donned became part of her everyday practice gear. She remembers going out with teammates to purchase more tights "so we can switch it up

[112] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.
[113] Drakich is a University of Toronto Sports Hall of Famer, former national indoor and beach player for Canada, and was the captain and all-Canadian when she played in university. She has been awarded coaching accolades. "2008-09 Women's Volleyball Coaching Staff," University of Toronto Varsity Blues (website), accessed November 11, 2016, http://varsityblues.ca/coaches.aspx?rc=138&path=wvball.

during practice…And they were like booty, like really really short [laugh].” Although Elodie made light of this recollection, she seemed to demonstrate an understanding that her “choice” to purchase “booty” shorts was not necessarily a liberating decision. Furthermore, Drakich took the impact of the sport’s misogyny on body image and self-esteem quite seriously. This had a lasting impression on Elodie, who had been told by other coaches to lose weight:

> Kristine Drakich was very much an advocate of performing well and not putting our weight down on our registration sheet or intake sheet. She was like, “You don’t need to put it down if you don’t want to.” Never did we do fat calipers and the bod pods to test what fat percentage we’re at. Her performance values were solely on performance. It didn’t matter your body type or body shape. It was all measure of performance.[114]

In university, unlike in the OVA, the coach deemphasized weight or speed tests. Elodie also critiqued, through Drakich, the salience of performance over body fat percentage or weight—separating aesthetics from performance.

While Drakich was instrumental in helping Elodie develop a sense of gender consciousness and encouraged her to qualify for the Olympics through the Pan African Games, Elodie felt when she was a player that Drakich’s feminism focused on gender to the exclusion of race. Elodie, who was one of Drakich’s assistant coaches, discussed with Drakich at 2015-2016 school year tryouts her concern about the lack of racial diversity in the intercollegiate competition, and believed that it was “on [Drakich’s] heart to want to change that culture as well ‘cause she does see that it is very white.” In Elodie’s views, Drakich’s politics had evolved to include issues of race and class, yet Elodie never dared to raise these concerns when she was a player. She was unsure why she had struggled to express to Drakich how racism had impacted her own experience in the league, but suggested that it was partly in her nature to not be confrontational. In my own discussion with Drakich in 2017 about the lack of racial diversity in

[114] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.

collegiate volleyball, she echoed Elodie's concerns about the inaccessibility to higher levels of competition due to class-based and geographic restrictions. Yet for Drakich, the pathway to addressing the sport's racial homogeneity seemed less clear than gender inequalities. Drakich was best able to draw clear political stances from her gendered experience as an elite player, a coach, and from serving on domestic and international boards for the sport's organizations:

> I've been at the highest levels in terms of both volunteering, administratively, as well as competitively. So, you know for me, sport is an incredible paradox. I try to figure out how to live in the middle of it….[T]o be able to stand up and say there's no reason for you to know my weight, there is no reason that you need to do any of that. I've spent a long time trying to help the international federation, as well as domestically [with] the uniforms that you wear and why you're choosing to wear them….It's a complicated road to navigate…At some point, it gets way too frustrating and so you say, "okay, in my little sphere of influence, these are the people I can help to think differently and help to be confident about who they are and what they are."[115]

Drakich has challenged many of the rules and cultural aspects of the sport such as the uniform, public weight statistics, and unequal privileges for men's and women's sports. Her work and politics thus reflected liberal feminism that foregrounded gendered struggles. Drakich's beliefs drew heavily from her own experience and her personal conviction to help others navigate the "complicated road" of putting one's body on display. She noted several times during this interview that as a player and coach, she had heard others comment on her own or other women's bodies. In this conversation, she expressed some fatigue as well as resignation about the limits of what she can achieve within the parameters of her position, or her "sphere." Drakich was and continues to be a significant figure in Elodie's life beyond the courts. She provided Elodie a pathway and language to articulate and challenge her gender oppression in the sport, for which Elodie has expressed tremendous gratitude. However, between Elodie's personal difficulties confronting her teammates and coach, and Drakich's limited personal and political

[115] Kristine Drakich, in conversation with the author, January 30, 2017.

experiences with issues of race, class, and migration, Elodie faced alienation within her university athletic context. As a result, Elodie developed much of her consciousness as an athlete of color in isolation from her team and coach.

"You Can't Teach Height"

The lack of visibility of Asians and people of color in the sport's mainstream circuit informed the complex ways Elodie negotiated her racial and ethnic identities as a varsity athlete. Over the course of several interviews, she consistently explained that the underrepresentation of Asians in the university volleyball league was a consequence of stature: Asians were simply shorter and thus disadvantaged in this sport. The facts suggest otherwise.[116] Several starting teammates during Elodie's five years were around her height (5'8), some slightly shorter or taller, including Heather Bansley, one of the most recognized volleyball players in Canada today.[117] When she compared the university and NACIVT leagues, the difference in skill boiled down to "biology":

> …because of our biology…we can't go up and bang balls down on the attack line. But instead of focusing on what we can't do, let's focus on what we can do, which is usually defense. And that kind of goes back to biology, in a way.[118]

Elodie tried out for the University of Toronto team with little expectation of making it as a "walk on." Her shift to "focus on what we can do" speaks in part to her coaching persona, but also the pervasive "can do" attitude in sport where players are "pep talked" into working within the confines of the sport's rules, opponents' skills, and individual abilities. Significantly, Elodie identified her race as both a limiting factor, given her inability to "bang balls down on the attack

[116] In recent years, volleyball has trended toward increased specialization of positions. This has resulted in fewer overall players and an increase in players who are exceptionally tall or short to fulfill positions with those height requirements.
[117] Heather Bansley is one of the highest-ranking beach volleyball players in Canada and is 5'7", an Olympian, and a former teammate of Elodie's.
[118] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2016.

line," and as the reason for her superior defensive skills. Significantly, she never occupied a defensive specialist role prior to University of Toronto. Race was thus a salient indicator of limitations and strengths in the sport for Elodie, and she claimed that it served her well as a university player. However, racial explanations for physical limitations did not come easily to Elodie. Following up on Elodie's comment that the White Man sets the norms (page 142), I asked her for examples. She responded:

> I think mainly height was a major thing 'cause everyone else was taller than me. And I mean, if you look, not very many Asians are tall, so in many ways, you're not white enough to play, but that might be stretching it.[119]

While Elodie's comment continued to assert Asians' biological disadvantage in the sport, she modified its impact with the words "but that might be stretching it." She spoke to the experiences of "othering" in mainstream volleyball via food or height without attributing either to larger systemic issues such as racism.[120] "I guess it's harder to pinpoint the systemic issues," she explained, "or maybe that's what we've been told all along like, 'Oh you know…sorry you can't teach height'" [Laugh].[121] Kristine Drakich is also Elodie's height, and a decorated Canadian national athlete. Nonetheless, for Elodie, Asians' disadvantage in the sport was rooted in race. By this logic, she had succeeded in her sport *despite* racial disadvantage, through ability alone. Moreover, Elodie's height was a source of what she called a state of "cultural limbo" outside of the volleyball courts:

> Even within my own community, I'm one of the tallest ones. You know, I talked about being in sort of a cultural limbo within my own Chinese community, I'm pretty tall, but in the volleyball community I'm pretty short.[122]

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[119] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2016.
[120] Height, while advantageous, is an unskilled component in a game that requires high technical ability, coordination, and strategy. While height is advantageous, it does not guarantee skill.
[121] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 25, 2016.
[122] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.

Height, for Elodie, thus served as a physical marker of her outsider status in both mainstream volleyball and in her Chinese community. Her athletic and racial physicality were entwined. If in her Chinese community her height signified her status as an athlete, in her athletic context, her height signified her Chinese identity.

Another way that Elodie identified her ethnicity in the university league was through racial distribution in positions assigned to Asian players. Male and female Asian players in the mainstream league during and just before Elodie's time, overwhelmingly occupied two typically "shorter" positions: *libero* and setter. During our conversation, we listed six East Asian women who had competed and excelled in the OUA league during or just before Elodie's time: Jenny Hui, Josie Ngiau, Aimee Shen, Michelle Park, Edith Buie, and Viv Chan. Five of the six women played either *libero* or setter. During her varsity years, Elodie accepted her libero position as the only position available to her:

> I think for me I was just like, "Yup, I can't [hit]" (laugh) and I've been given this position (*libero*). I was just like, "Wow I got a chance to be on the team, I got a chance to actually play. I'm just going to own it." Yeah, I don't know why I didn't actually try to fight for a hitting position. Now that I think back on it, maybe I should of. I didn't even think that was an option. Looking back on it now, it's like crazy, 'cause that is an option if you really want it right? [123]

Despite knowing quite a few white players around Elodie's height or shorter, she did not think that fighting for a hitting position "was an option," which speaks to the salience of race in informing her perceived options.

Asian women occupying white hegemonic athletic spaces not only contended with racialized stereotypes of the unathletic body, they asserted themselves in sporting domains

[123] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, October 17, 2016.

defined by masculine ideals of Western athleticism.[124] In volleyball, hitting and blocking positions were considered exceptionally aggressive, physical, and "masculine," thus height offered clear advantages. Conversely, in the position that Elodie occupied—*libero*—understood as defensive and passive, excess height could be a liability. The setter position was also considered less aggressive, more cerebral, and strategic, much like the quarterback of a football team. The language around height thus feminized the position Elodie occupied in ways that justified the exclusion of Asians who were perceived as too "short" for roles coded masculine. As a racial minority and a "walk-on" for the University of Toronto women's volleyball tryouts, Elodie was happy just to make the cut.[125] When we discussed some of the Asian players in the league, she suggested that they, too, "got stuck" playing *libero*, despite being skilled hitters. Now part of the coaching staff for University of Toronto's women's volleyball team, Elodie herself used the phrase that she had heard as a girl—"You can't teach height"—to explain the lack of Asians in the university league. Nonetheless, she harbored some suspicion about the racial undertones of the phrase, expressed, significantly, in the addendum, "that's what we were always told."

[124] Nicole Willms, *When Women Rule the Court: Gender, Race, and Japanese American Basketball,* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University press, 2017), 189.
[125] Walk-on refers to players who show up to tryouts without being recruited. Making the team as a walk-on is extremely unlikely and unusual.

Figure 2.4 Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in blue the jersey playing *libero* for the University of Toronto's women's volleyball team, 2004. (Photo courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Elodie's varsity experience suggests some of the vulnerability of volleyball players of color to stereotypes that rationalize their underrepresentation. When Asian physicality is racialized as inherently shorter and unathletic, Asians' presence on the court is viewed as exceptional. This is particularly true when Asian players occupy hitting positions, as did Michelle Park: the last woman to play on University of Toronto's starting lineup as a hitter since 2001.[126] The logic of height and performance mediated Elodie's reflections on her own success in the league as an ethnically Chinese woman. Elodie's investment in the logic that Asians are shorter than average, and that height influences performance, allowed her to construct a narrative in which her ability to rise above racial barriers in the sport was based on merit. For Elodie, this narrative redeemed her from some of the perceived racial challenges she faced in the OVA and

[126] Two other Asian players made the team as hitter since Park's time but neither of them started nor did they play on the team for more than a year or two.

from her rejection from the Ontario junior provincial team. It substantiated her identity as an athlete.

Conclusion

Elodie's investment in her athletic identity exposes the paradox of sport as a site of oppression and opportunity. In Canada's mainstream volleyball leagues, the rhetoric of meritocracy in sport normalized the subtle practices of exclusion that rendered Elodie a cultural outsider to her OVA and University of Toronto teams, as well as to the Canadian national body. Yet Elodie simultaneously used sport to challenge the limitations of race and gender within Canadian culture.[127] For Elodie, athletic performance provided a means to enact personal agency and to participate in dominant culture—though always within limits. As a successful varsity volleyball player in an overwhelmingly white field, Elodie challenged racial stereotypes of unathletic Asian female bodies, yet her memories of the University league expose the strategies that rationalized the underrepresentation of persons of color. The NACIVT league, by contrast, offered Elodie a space to embrace and to cultivate both her athletic and ethnic identities, but as a member of the league, Elodie entered a milieu that reflected a history and experience far from her own: that of Chinese immigrants in North America. Her reflections on the league suggest the limitations of sport as a pathway to cultural citizenship when culture is overdetermined by a narrative written from the historical perspective of Chinese, male, and working-class immigrants.

Elodie's athletic identity continued to evolve after her graduation from university. In 2006, she returned to Mauritius seeking an opportunity to represent her country of birth in global competitions. She did so having accumulated skills, connections, and expectations of the sport in a Western context.

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[127] Janelle Joseph, Simon Darnell, and Yuka Nakamura, preface to Joseph, Darnell, and Nakamura, *Race and Sport*, xii.

CHAPTER 3

The Unromantic Homecoming

The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we go as we are and not be questioned.

—Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes*[1]

The single story creates stereotypes and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "Danger of a Single Story"[2]

In 2006, after graduating from teacher's college, Elodie moved to Mauritius for sixteen months to seek a beach volleyball partner and to rekindle a relationship to her country of birth. But Elodie's experience did not fulfill her fantasies of return to a welcoming homeland. Saidiya Hartman has written compellingly of the betrayal of her dreams of the African "motherland" during her trip to the Gold Coast. For Elodie too, the "homecoming" to Africa was anything but smooth. Indeed, as a diasporic subject who had inhabited multiple nations, the process was arguably more complex. Elodie returned to a "home" where she was part of a small diasporic group of Chinese ethnicity. In the years of her absence, the country had experienced economic decline and restructuring as well as a rise in ethnoreligious fundamentalism. A new wave of Chinese migrants had arrived to fill the export processing zones (EPZs), and an influx of mega grocery stores had undermined local shops. Meanwhile, rising interethnic tensions proved a combustible mix, resulting in race riots during the late 1990s. Elodie knew of these developments from the short trips that she had taken to Mauritius in her childhood, but not until her return to the islands did she experience their daily impact.

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[1] Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (New York: Vintage, 1991).
[2] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," lecture at TEDGlobal 2009, filmed July 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story#t-979661.

Elodie's return to Mauritius neither erased her complex diasporic subjectivity in Canada nor restored her "original" identity as a Chinese Mauritian. Instead, the hostility that she encountered while playing for the national indoor volleyball team made her question her dream of representing Mauritius in athletics on an international stage. Elodie soon settled into a routine, living with her paternal grandmother, Rosemay, in the country's capital, Port Louis. But playing for the national team for one short season in 2007 was jarring, particularly because of her reception by teammates. Elodie's Canadian citizenship served as ever-present reminder to her volleyball peers of her privileged status. While Elodie felt proud to represent Mauritius, competitors and teammates openly challenged her authenticity as a Mauritian national. Not only was Elodie a dual Mauritian and Canadian citizen who had spent more years in Canada than in the land of her birth; her unfamiliarity with the evolution of the Créole language pegged her as an inauthentic Mauritian. Additionally, her Canadian university education and Canadian citizenship were socioeconomic privileges which distanced her not only from her African competitors in volleyball, but also from most people in Mauritius.

Like Canada, Mauritius had adopted the rhetoric of multiculturalism in the late 1960s. In the decades following independence, Mauritius embraced its reputation as a multicultural, postcolonial success story in the eyes of international financial institutions.[3] The Mauritian government's version of multiculturalism sought national solidarity through an integrationist ideal. But not all citizens participated in this framework as equals.[4] The fall after the "boom years" for Mauritius in the late 1990s and early 2000s exposed the material deprivation, economic disparities, and growing marginalization of Mauritians of black African ancestry.[5] By

[3] Aumeerally, "Tiger in Paradise," 163.
[4] Boswell, *Ethnic Identity in Mauritius,* 8.
[5] Kasenally, "Mauritius: Paradise Reconsidered," 165.

contrast, in the decades following independence, Mauritian-born Chinese—who were predominantly shopkeepers—had more opportunity to work in civil service and own their businesses and homes, enriching their labor and living conditions.[6] Chinese youth who came of age in the wake of independence sought employment outside of the traditional shopkeeper role and moved into professional domains. Elodie's parents fell within this trend. With the exception of the recent wave of migrants from China working in EPZs, Chinese Mauritians with deeper ties to the country have generally enjoyed higher socioeconomic status than black Mauritians and many Créole Mauritians.[7] In fact, economic and sociological scholars of post-independence Mauritius regularly describe Chinese Mauritians as a prosperous racial minority.[8]

Scrutiny of Elodie's multiple identities intensified when she started touring as a beach volleyball athlete across Africa in order to qualify for the Olympics. For the two years prior to the 2012 Games, Elodie left her job as a Toronto school teacher to compete in pan-African competitions. Throughout this period, Elodie's Chinese ethnicity and bi-national status undermined her legitimacy as an African competitor vying for an Olympic berth via the African Continental Cup. The qualification process took Elodie through Namibia, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Rwanda. With each passing stage of the competition at the African Continental Trials, her sense of alienation grew. As the top competitor in the African circuit, Team Mauritius (particularly Elodie) came under scrutiny for not being "African" or "black" enough to represent the continent in beach volleyball. Furthermore, the significant diasporic population in Mauritius, its status as an island nation, and its reputation as one of Africa's postcolonial success stories

[6] Ly Tio Fane-Pineo and Lim Fat, *From Alien to Citizen*, 220.
[7] Créoles in Mauritius are heterogeneous group in terms of socioeconomic status, religion, and ethnicity. Rosabell Boswell uncovers that there is no one definition of Créoles in Mauritius, but they have ancestral roots tied to black African and Malagasy slaves brought to the country. As described in chapter 1, the phenomenon of *Malaise Créole* speaks to the on-going process of racialization rooted in the histories of slavery and colonialism.
[8] Aumeerally, "Tiger in Paradise," 169; Srebrnik, "Sound and Fury," 277; and Lincoln, "Beyond the Plantation," 73.

positioned the country itself as "exceptional"—an identity that further challenged Elodie's African authenticity. Her beach volleyball partner presented similar representational issues. Natacha—a light-skinned Créole Mauritian—was a long-term resident (but not citizen) of France. Both Elodie and Natacha were perceived as privileged outsiders to the league due to their ethnicity, emigration to wealthier nations, and Western athletic backgrounds.

Elodie, too, was uncomfortably aware of her own relative privilege. If she represented Mauritius through birthright, she staked a claim to the sport by leveraging her familiarity with beach volleyball's Euro-American style of play to enact individual agency and persevere in competition. Elodie also brought to African competitions perspectives about merit and sport that derived from her experience in Canada. By consequence, she was critical of her competitors and of inadequacies of the beach volleyball program in Africa. Elodie was aware that her "difference"—rooted in her ethnicity and diasporic experience—also bestowed certain advantages. It left her reluctant to speak forcefully against the opposition and occasional hostility that she faced on the national team and pan-African tour.

Instead, Elodie sought the opportunity to compete at the Olympics to "put Mauritius on the map," and to resist the Western tendency to collapse the entire continent of Africa into a single narrative of condescension and pity. After all, she reminded me, no other continent was mistaken for a single country. She hoped to create alternative accounts through sport that reflected the diversity and complexity of African nations and cultures, including those of Mauritius.[9] She hoped as well for a feeling of cultural belonging beyond the claims of birth. Within Mauritius, the history of turn-of-the-century Chinese migration to Africa was often occluded within regional narratives of colonialism, historical migration, and multiculturalism.

[9] Adichie, "Single Story."

Elodie understood what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie referred to as "the danger of a single story." Her own Chinese ethnicity, Christian faith, and dual Canadian/Mauritian citizenship attested to the complexity of African identities. She claimed her country of birth, composed of intersecting histories of immigrants, settlers, and slaves. Her very presence stood as a challenge to singular notions of African identity. Born of Chinese ethnicity, Mauritian nationality, and with a Canadian education, Elodie claimed the right to represent Africa. And yet, at times Elodie deployed idealized multicultural values that mirrored that of the Olympics to assert her belonging in international competitions. Despite the way multicultural rhetoric glossed over Elodie's experiences with racism in Canada and discrimination in Mauritius, within Africa, her use of multicultural rhetoric was distorted by her relative privilege over most of her athletic peers.

Elodie's life-long ambition to compete at the Olympics contended with her desire to represent Mauritius and to disrupt homogenous scripts of Africa. Her presence at the pan-African competitions opened her up to criticism. Simultaneously, the nature of the Olympic qualification incited competitiveness and a single focus on athletic victory, not the opportunity to foster critical social dialogue between athletes. The arrangement of international sport insulated Elodie and competitors alike from suffering that took place near tournament venues and atrocities within the host country at large. In the pursuit of her Olympic dreams, Elodie faced internal strife about the legitimacy of her social goal to represent Mauritius and Africa. Was this goal merely a veil for her personal athletic ambition? Had she adopted the narrative of embracing diversity primarily for self-interest—in order to negotiate her complicated athletic career? Nonetheless, the very construction of international competition prevented Elodie from challenging the social issues that she faced, witnessed, and embodied. Despite her discomfort in African competitions,

Elodie endured racial ostracism in silence, keeping at an emotional distance the contradiction between her social mission and her individual athletic pursuits.[10]

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Homecoming and Sport

Living in Mauritius felt little like past trips to her country of birth. Following the initial circuit of visits to extended family, Elodie scribbled in her diary: "After my parents left about a week ago I started feeling homesick but I just need to give it time to adjust and to find a job so I can settle into a routine."[11] Elodie's transition involved difficult shifts to daily life in a country that did not feel much like "home." But memories of childhood interactions with her grandmother gave Elodie a sense of belonging and comfort:

> I remember when I was younger [grandma] making me breakfast, sitting at that table, having conversations with her, drinking tea…I spent a lot of my earlier days on the beach. And there's a particular go-to beach that I used to go with my family, quite a bit, especially with my grandma. …I remember when I was younger she'd send me off to buy bread in the morning 'cause that was part of our breakfast routine. So, I'd go over to the bread factory... [They] knew me there too and they were like, "You so and so's granddaughter." [W]hen I'd go and pick up groceries for her on this road, they'd be like, "Oh yeah, so and so's grandchild." And I was like, "Yeah, you better give me a good price or my grandma's going to come down and yell at you" [laugh].[12]

Having lived in Canada since childhood, it made sense that Elodie felt most at home in Mauritius when reliving fond activities with her grandmother: a regular and recognized patron of the markets. Even as Elodie visited familiar sites and busied herself in familiar routines, in public spaces she perpetually negotiated her sense of belonging:

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[10] Mauritius celebrates in images and discourse its ethnically diverse citizenry. Government and tourist websites tout the country's ethnic make-up, which includes the Chinese. In the realm of international athletics, there are Chinese representatives for the country in individual sports like badminton and swimming. For volleyball, Elodie asserts that the majority of players are black or Créole. Elodie was one of two Chinese players on the indoor national team (2006-2007). The other Chinese player was biracial.

[11] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, diary entry provided to the author, August 16, 2006.

[12] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, March 22, 2017.

> Somehow, they knew I was not born and bred Mauritian. I didn't grow up there. Even though I spoke Créole, some people told me I spoke with a little bit of an accent even though I didn't think so, compared to some of the other Canadian Mauritians that I know. I think it's probably the way that I dressed. A lot of men would catcall. Even though I'd dress conservatively, I [felt] forced to dress even more conservatively.[13]

In Mauritius, although she wore conservative clothing, the styling and brands identified her as foreign and drew unwanted attention. Elodie also struggled to adjust to the standard of living in Mauritius, where many still washed clothing by hand. Despite its reputation as a middle-income and successful postcolonial nation, Mauritius had limited public transportation and sparse internet access, and communities experienced regular power outages and water shortages.

Privilege to Play on the National Team (2007)

As part of Elodie's effort to integrate herself into Mauritian life, she started playing for a club team in a primarily Créole neighborhood in what she described as the ghettoized district, Cité Vallé Jee.[14] Around the same time she had started a job for a transcription company that turned voicemails from London to readable texts for cellphone users. Elodie viewed the work as a form of low-skilled exported labor, even though she described the position as a nine-to-five working-class job comfortably above minimum wage.[15] All of her teammates worked full-time jobs as well—most, unlike Elodie, in the tourist and service industries, a socioeconomic distinction that instantly pegged Elodie as privileged. Elodie did not stay long at the job. The commute to and from work followed by evening practices made for long days, and her salary, when converted to Canadian currency was hardly seventeen dollars per day. Recognizing that the job "wasn't worth it," Elodie quit, asking her parents for assistance so that she could focus on

[13] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.
[14] Only a handful of teammates were from Cité Vallé Jee, the rest came from other parts of the island. The team's name was Vallé Jee Citizens.
[15] Elodie was making 9,000 rupees a month—roughly equivalent to 350 Canadian dollars today. This salary included 7,000 rupees of base pay and 2,000 in bonuses for good work.

volleyball. Practically none of her teammates had the resources and leisure time to focus primarily on volleyball. Her family's migration to Canada and their comfortable working- and middle-class settlement in the country meant that sending Elodie the cost of her salary was a relatively small expense.

By the time that Elodie entered the club volleyball system in Mauritius, she was no longer a child or a tourist experiencing Mauritius sheltered under her parents' wings. Her ethnicity and Canadian citizenship made her an instant outsider, thrusting her into complex racial interactions among teammates and the broader society. The kinds of ethnicity- and nation-based hostility that she experienced provided a window on the interethnic and socioeconomic strains endemic within the country. For instance, when Elodie walked through the streets of Cité Vallé Jee toward her club's gym, she recalled, "a lot of people would look at me and [were] like, 'What's she doing here?' 'Cause you didn't see many Chinese people there."[16] But her ethnicity also connoted socioeconomic privilege—a fact that goes far toward explaining the absence of Chinese residents in that neighborhood. When the economic boom years in Mauritius ended in late 1990s and early 2000s, Créole and black Mauritians had taken the hardest hit. The Lomé Convention, Multi Fibre Agreement, and other preferential trade agreements had expired leaving Mauritian textile and manual laborers in search for new employment.[17] The Chinese community, by contrast, chose mass emigration in the post-independence decades—Elodie's parents among them (see Chapter 1). Of those who remained, the children of Chinese shopkeepers generally transitioned to the professional labor force within a generation.

[16] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.
[17] Starting in the mid-1990s the United States government successfully filed petitioned to the World Trade Organization (WTO) indicting that the Lomé Convention and other preferential trade agreements between the European Union (EU) and the ACP violated WTO rules. The WTO ruling ended the Lomé Convention in 1996. In 2004, the MFA followed suit and expired.

As a relatively privileged outsider—regardless of birthplace—and as an ethnic minority in Mauritius and on her team, Elodie found it hard to blend in. Elodie's teammates were mostly Créole and black, joined by a few Indian athletes and one other Chinese woman with mixed-raced ancestry. While few Chinese athletes participated in the realm of team sports, in generations past, Chinese Mauritians had overwhelmingly occupied athletic spaces. Elodie's maternal uncle Joseph Hip Sing (pseud)—president of the Mauritian Basketball Association for twenty-five years and member of the Mauritian Olympic Committee for eight—recalled the days when Chinese Mauritian youth flocked to the gymnasium and founded basketball leagues for both genders.[18] Joseph remains a prominent figure in the competitive basketball world in Mauritius, but he is one of few residual Chinese Mauritians in the country's competitive world of team sports. Chinese players of his and subsequent generations left the country for studies resulting in the decline of Chinese Mauritian athletic participation. Many did not want to sacrifice for the commitment needed to compete at higher levels.[19]

Like Elodie's club team, the Mauritian national volleyball team was comprised largely of black and Créole Mauritians. Elodie joined the team post-recruitment season in 2007. The coach immediately recognized her skill and put her on the starting lineup, displacing players who had fought for that spot over the years, and drawing negative attention as both newcomer and usurper. Teammates scrutinized the little they knew about Elodie. She endured heightened forms of ethnic "teasing" that exposed the fragility of the country's multiethnic identity:

> We're a minority there, the Chinese population, and so my nickname playing for the national team was "Chinese." They never addressed me by my name. I was referred to by race. So, I was called "Chinese" and then my nickname evolved to "*bao*," which is like

[18] Joseph Hip Sing, in conversation with the author, with Elodie Li Yuk Lo as interpreter, June 20, 2017.
[19] Joseph Hip Sing, conversation. Recently though, Joseph had noticed that Chinese Mauritians were taking up competitive sports in individual events like badminton, tennis, and swimming—sports that did not require teammates to make similar sacrifices or commitment.

> *boulette*, dumplings in Créole…[I]n Mauritius we're a minority, the Chinese people are also a minority in Africa, and so [we] really stand out if you don't look African. That's why I guess I catch shit unnecessarily and I'd be asked whether I was African or not because I don't look African…they would always make my color known to me by what they would call me.[20]

Elodie was also called "chin yuk" meaning pork in Chinese and Créole.[21] Teammates never called Elodie by her name. Despite Africa's racial and ethnic heterogeneity, she explained, Asians were often not viewed as African, even in multiracial Mauritius. In Elodie's experience, not "looking African" meant she did not look black enough. The players—mostly Créole and black African women—represented the populations most vulnerable to the country's declining economies.[22] The combination of her ethnicity and upbringing in Canada further alienated Elodie from the team:

> I remember when I first joined the indoor national team, they were like, "Ok, who's this girl who just came back from Canada?" "Who does she think she is…taking my slot?" or stuff like that. I think they just felt threatened and that was the only way they could express their frustration.[23]

Elodie resented the way that teammates overlooked her performance by focusing on her Canadian upbringing and Chinese ethnicity. Unlike in Canada, where her athletic abilities silenced critics, in Mauritius, Elodie had to deal with more overt forms of racial banter regardless of skill. She was also unaccustomed to the way teammates referred to and interacted with one another through racial monikers. Eventually, she grew accustomed to the way teammates

[20] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, October 27, 2013.
[21] According to Elodie, "chin yuk" is a play on both her ethnicity and the resemblance to her Chinese name, Nioun Chin since "choo niouk" is the Hakka Chinese word for pork.
[22] Lincoln, "Beyond the Plantation," 67-68.
[23] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, April 10, 2013.

addressed her in racial terms. As she put it, "you kind of become desensitized to it."[24] This racial and ethnic repartee was not only directed at Elodie:

> There was another girl on our team who was Indian, one of the only Indian girls on our team, and she was called *malai*, which is sort of like Créole for Indians, but slightly derogatory. Not as bad as calling like a Chinese person "chink," but in between those two. And then with this really black girl on the team, [teammates] would call her '*nation*' which is like the Créole equivalent of the 'N word,' in Mauritius.
>
> Yuka: And it refers to the people who are black or indigenous to Mauritius?
>
> EL: Yeah. Like really dark, from the country, who are not educated and African I guess.[25]

Not everyone on the team was called out by her race. Créole players of a specific hue remained unscathed by the racial taunting:

> Elodie: If you're too white, then you'd be like the posh-y Créole person. If you were too dark then you'd be "*nation*," like the "Nations of Mauritius," so you have to be not too dark, not too white.
>
> Yuka: Where do Asian people fit in?
>
> Elodie: I guess the whiter end.[26]

Elodie's observations spoke to the colorism that continues to pervade many colonized spaces. In Mauritius, the French interpretation of *gens de couleur* (people of color) positions lighter-skinned people further up in the country's pigmentocracy.[27] Equally, the *gens de couleur* would refer to the *Créole Morisyen* emphasizing their Africanity and savagery.[28] The team's racial

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[24] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, April 10, 2013.
[25] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, April 10, 2013.
[26] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, April 10, 2013.
[27] Boswell, *Ethnic Identity in Mauritius,* 56. During slavery, some slaves were freed through various means. These individuals were distinguished by their freed status but sometimes their lighter skin color, which Boswell argues is part of social significance of the French's interpretation of "free coloured people," Boswell, 49. The term *Créole Morisyen* became strongly associated with Mauritians possessing Afro-Malagasy phenotypical features in the early 1990s.
[28] Boswell, 56. *Gens de couleur* occasionally referred to *Créole Morisyen* as *Mazambiks* (Mozambicans) or refer to black Créole men as *noir chiolos* (black vagabonds). Boswell found that in contemporary Mauritius, *Créole Morisyen* occasionally refers to *gens de couleur* as *Créole fer blanc* (wannabe whites), highlighting the Francophile nature and racism of the *gens de couleur*.

composition did not proportionally reflect the country's demographics. While the context of the National team did not shield athletes from perpetuating interethnic tensions, these overt displays of racial and ethnic division did not necessarily prevent teammates from forming friendships or socializing with one another either. Perhaps this was one way to "put out there" racial disparities, rather than denying their existence.

Elodie's experiences on the Mauritian national team suggest that representing one's "homeland" could divide rather than unify. Rather than feeling pride and reconnection to Mauritius, Elodie felt the social impact of growing up outside of Mauritius in ways that further contributed to her sense of alienation on the team. Elodie experienced a sense of connection primarily during moments of celebration, but even those moments reminded her of her positions as both insider and outsider:

> Maybe when we were cheering it was different, and like when we were singing *sega,* it was different but I didn't know all the *sega* songs, so I didn't necessarily feel connected there but I thought it was cool. That was part of my culture.[29]

Elodie was familiar with some *seg*a music and felt fairly comfortable speaking Créole but growing up in Canada meant that her vernacular and knowledge of popular culture either froze from the time of her emigration or was mediated through her parents and relatives. On the team, she lacked cultural common ground with her generational peers:

> [T]here were specific cultural references that I didn't know and I had to ask my friends to explain it, or, translate it for me because there are a lot of Mauritian expressions and it always evolves and I'm always behind on those expressions.[30]

Elodie had hoped for a sense of camaraderie and unity that she would experience on the national team. After all, volleyball in Canada was a significant way for Elodie to ground her belonging in the country and to build social bonds. Especially among diasporic groups, sports help to recreate

[29] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.
[30] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.

of a sense of belonging based on a mutual interest in the game.[31] But Elodie felt that her teammates did not necessarily claim her on this basis. Regardless, she felt some sense of pride and belonging particularly when she was on the court. As one of the stronger members of the team, she earned substantial playing time.

In Mauritius as in Canada, Elodie held to her belief that volleyball should unite the team. "All other elements," she stated, should be "left outside of the court."[32] It is unsurprising, then, that she felt most connected to the team when she was on the court playing. During competitions, she did not think about issues of her race, ethnicity, and migratory status. For Elodie, all that mattered was her own and team's performance and her teammates' mutual passion for competing. While playing for University of Toronto, Elodie invested in the rhetoric of merit and performance to justify her presence on the team. It is striking that while representing Mauritius, Elodie claimed belonging primarily through birthright and genealogy, even if teammates did not necessarily confer her belonging based on these grounds. She was unprepared for how her ethnicity and emigration status proved difficult-to-penetrate boundaries in the negotiation process of seeking social entry on the national team. Several teammates had responded to Elodie's presence by drawing a social limit based on her differences (ethnicity and bi-nationality) and used them to define a team identity that excluded her.[33] Elodie's social and cultural difficulties connecting with the team and the nation thus collided with her idealized expectations of return to her "motherland."

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[31] Ramón Spaaij and Jora Broerse, "Diaspora as Aesthetic Formation: Community Sports Events and the Making of a Somali Diaspora," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 2018 (January 2018): 4, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1427052.
[32] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.
[33] Ramón Spaaij, "Refugee Youth, Belonging and Community Sport," *Leisure Studies* 34, no. 3 (March 2015): 306, https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2014.893006.

Going to China

In the middle of the season Elodie traveled to Yantai, China with the national team for a training camp. Unlike her fantasies of Mauritius, Elodie did not expect that her visit to China would represent a homecoming, despite her ancestral ties to the country. Her expectations proved correct this time. At no point did she feel a sense of "home" during her visit except when experiencing few familiar customs around food:

> … like when we went to dinner, serving your elders, having respect there, making sure that the important people got their food first. Having that kind cultural [experience] was cool 'cause I understood that.[34]

Even so, she lacked feelings of connection to ancestral China. In her childhood, those very ancestral ties had triggered painful struggles, especially around language. In Mauritius, Elodie's underdeveloped social vernacular and antiquated Créole exposed her long absence; in China, her inability to speak a Chinese dialect made her invisible to her hosts:

> They'd kind of overlook me. Like I wasn't even there. They were like, "Oh, she doesn't even speak Chinese but she looks Chinese." I just felt like they ignored me, or worse. You look [Chinese] but don't even speak [Chinese]. And I think too, part of it is just they feel like I rejected my own culture, or [like] I'm too good for that culture.[35]

Issues around language had been a consistent source of alienation—a reminder of a ruptured link to her roots. Elodie's sense of rejection in China reminded her of experiences in Toronto's Chinese diasporic community:

> Even here, when I go to Chinatown, people assume that 'cause I look Chinese I can speak it. So that was a really hard reality. I can't speak [Chinese] and I'm trying to explain myself, but we're just kind of stuck. I'm like "I should be able to speak it."[36]

[34] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.
[35] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.
[36] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.

She sensed that host athletes found her status as a Chinese Mauritian confusing at best and objectionable at worst. In short, she found herself once again in a state of limbo between nations and cultures.

In one sense, at least, Elodie was uniquely positioned to build cultural bridges through her dual English and Créole linguistic abilities:

> Elodie: So, we had a translator that was part of the team.
>
> Yuka: Was she Mauritian?
>
> Elodie: No, she's from China, like from that area. She spoke English…So, we'd go to places with her, but often times I would also be mistaken as the translator because I also look Chinese. And we only had two Chinese people on the team. But the other person looked more mixed. It was funny too because I was the translator for a lot of the girls who didn't speak English as well, to speak English to this translator to then [she'd] speak Chinese [laugh].[37]

The few members of the team who spoke English did so less frequently and fluently than did Elodie. Elodie became the unofficial cultural broker, helping teammates understand various social customs, particularly around food, that she had learned within her Chinese diasporic communities in Toronto and Mauritius. Nonetheless, despite these hybrid forms of cultural connections, Elodie felt disconnected from her sense of Chinese identity stemming from language, an absence of relatives, and the hosts' limited knowledge about Chinese people in diaspora.

Even if the players unified under the banner of the national team, they remained invested in the complex racial dynamics and politics of national belonging that surfaced on this trip. Elodie's Canadian history and Chinese ancestry elicited opposition about her fit on the team. She made for an easy target. Like Asian settlers in Hawai‘i, Chinese settlers in Mauritius were complicit in colonial hierarchies, even though they themselves experienced, to varying degrees,

[37] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.

the struggles of colonial subjects.[38] By the early twentieth-century, the Chinese had already begun to form their own intragovernmental organization to help those within their community navigate their existence in British Mauritius.[39] In the post-independence decades, Mauritian elites valued the Chinese in Mauritius for their economic rise and ability to produce ties to larger global economies. Asian settlers (Hindu-Indians and Chinese) in Mauritius had risen in status through adopting colonial practices in politics and the economy that continued the marginalization others. While Elodie staunchly opposed racism and did not knowingly engage in the oppression of others, on her team of mostly black and Créole athletes, Elodie embodied contemporary privileges rooted in these settler colonial legacies of Mauritius. Not surprisingly, on this trip, teammates inverted a familiar racial slur used by Chinese Mauritians directed at non-Chinese in Mauritius. Elodie tried to explain to me the nature of racial hostility that she had experienced:

> Elodie: [Teammates] often joked around with me. [Laugh] I think one of the running jokes was, in Mauritius Chinese people are known for being pretty racist…And there's an expression in Chinese where everybody else to us would be called, "not a person." I don't even know how to translate it: *paqui.* How do we say white people in Cantonese?
>
> Yuka: *Gweilo.*[40]
>
> Elodie: *Gweilo*. So, we have the same thing in Hakka in Mauritius and the translation is essentially like [how] you describe their color but it also means they're not a person. So, the running joke on my team was that, "Yeah there's nobody in this country." I was like,

[38] Fujikane and Okamura's discussion of Asian settler colonialism is premised on the distinction between how non-native Hawaiians and Native Hawaiians make claims to land. The history of Mauritius is absent of a known indigenous group; however, the theory is useful in examining the way Asian settlers in Mauritius are complicit in and benefit from colonial structures. Fujikane and Okamura, *Asian Settler Colonialism.*

[39] In chapter 1, I discuss the instrumental role of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, as well as the way most Chinese migrants baptized their children in order to send them to better Catholic schools. Unlike Asian settler colonialism in Hawai'i, the Chinese in Mauritius were not plantation laborers, though the Indians were, along with black and Créole descendants of Malagasy and African slaves. With the advent of independence, Hindu-Indian laborers infiltrated spaces of political governance, while white Europeans and elite creoles emigrated to wealthier nations or remained as affluent elites in the country.

[40] This is Cantonese slang for foreigner and it generally refers to people of European descent. We learned it from growing up in the peripheries of Toronto's Chinese diasporic community. *Gwei* meaning "ghost," and *lo* meaning a man or regular guy. The term *gweilo* therefore literally means "ghost man."

> "What do you mean? This country's the most populated." And then they would reverse what we [Chinese Mauritians] had called them. That's the joke. It's like Chinese people aren't people. "There's only like…fifteen people in this country." I was like what do you mean?
>
> Yuka: So, non-Chinese in Mauritius know about the way Chinese people in Mauritius call them *paqui*?
>
> Elodie: Yeah. And there are other words.
>
> Yuka: Other words in addition to *paqui?*
>
> Elodie: Yeah, like *paqui* I forget if it's just for a white person. [T]here's a term for white people, there's a term for black people, there's a term for Indian people.[41]

This "joke," while at Elodie's expense, was one way that teammates drew attention to racism in Mauritius from the Chinese community: a relatively elite, insular, and upwardly mobile ethnic group. In response, members of the team defined Elodie, and by implication Chinese people, as outsiders. They redirected toward more privileged Chinese, an ethnic slur—"not a person"—that originally targeted non-Chinese Mauritians. The intensified ethnic teasing on this trip shows how Elodie's teammates read her membership in the Chinese Mauritian community as complicit in Mauritius' racial hierarchy. Her family's ability to emigrate out of Mauritius, her upward mobility through obtaining a Canadian university degree, and her Western athletic training reaffirmed to teammates her ethnic privilege.

[41] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.

Figure 3.1 Mauritian women's national team at training camp in China, 2007. Elodie (back row in between players no. 6 and 12) (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Jeux des Îles

Throughout the 2006-2007 season, Elodie struggled to reestablish a connection with Mauritius through her participation on the country's national team. She reflected on this time in Mauritius as the "dark days." But August 2007 marked a turning point: the Mauritian women's volleyball team travelled to Madagascar to participate in the seventh Indian Ocean Island Games. The Island Games offered some personal redemption from Elodie's alienation from her team and nation. The country was not expected to do well in the women's volleyball competition, but against all expectation, Elodie's team earned a spot in the semifinals alongside the tournament favorites, Seychelles. Elodie remembered playing better than she had ever played, and for the first time, she felt pride in representing Mauritius.[42] Yet, this tournament also reaffirmed Elodie's advantage as a Canadian-trained athlete and thus as an outsider to her teammates and competitors. Elodie's struggles to claim her diasporic subjectivities as a Mauritian representative in the sport stoked her desire to assert her belonging in this competition. She did so through her

[42] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017. It was during the opening ceremonies of these games that Elodie first felt national pride in representing Mauritius.

performance, her insider knowledge, and her access to the dominant (read: Westernized) volleyball culture, as well as through birthright.

This tournament not only brought out Elodie's competitive nature, it violated the expectations of team culture that she had developed during her years at the University of Toronto. Elodie's athletic performance throughout this tournament carried her team to the semi-finals—but at the cost of an injury. In the second set of that match she heard a "pop," followed by pain. Elodie pushed through the injury and helped win the set, bring the match to 2-1 for Mauritius. By the fourth set, the pain was too great, and she was no longer able to play.[43] The team lost the match as well as the bronze medal game.

Elodie was taken aback with how her peers dealt with her injury; indeed, their behavior ran directly counter to what she was accustomed to as a member of a leading Canadian university team. Her former teammates regarded injuries with the utmost seriousness and offered moral and physical support. By contrast, the Mauritian team coach and players insisted that she play through her injury for their benefit. It offended Elodie that while they relied on her athletic prowess, they seemed to care little for her beyond that:

> Elodie: [I]t was a very difficult time. I don't think many people understood what had happened because you can't see an MCL (medial collateral ligament) tear.[44] [At one point] I was sleeping on the top bunk and I was having to climb up the bed to sleep. Nobody offered the bottom bunk for me, I was a little upset about that at the time. I just didn't understand.
>
> Yuka: So, people on your team didn't understand?
>
> Elodie: Yeah, and maybe because they didn't understand the severity of the injury and how much I was actually suffering. Even my coach didn't understand. He wanted to play me for the bronze medal match but, I remember calling Dr. Richards from Madagascar. I

[43] The match was best out of five sets. The team was one set away from winning when Elodie could no longer play due to her injury.
[44] An MCL tear commonly occurs with anterior cruciate ligament tears, which are much more serious. In Canada, these kinds of knee injuries are commonly known to volleyball players of many levels.

> don't know how. I must have gotten a long-distance card or something. I was like, "Can you explain to my coach that I can't play? I heard a pop and it really hurts and it's swollen." It wasn't until after my coach spoke to [Dr. Richards] he was like, "Okay fine." Even my teammates didn't understand that I couldn't play. They were like, "you're fine, you can play."[45]

In her experiences on Connex and the varsity team, Elodie likened the team to family. The intense and intimate group schedule of travel, practice, and competition fostered strong homosocial bonds with former teammates. She had grown accustomed to eating, sleeping, changing and showering among current teammates, and had come to expect a certain degree of understanding and support from her "family." Caring for her injury should have been an extension of the bodily nature of her exchanges and a way to feel included on the team. Between matches, Elodie had found a way to call her former sports medicine doctor at the University of Toronto—Dr. Richards—who insisted to her Mauritian national team coach that Elodie's injury was too severe for her to continue playing. Doing so, Elodie had exercised her connection to Canadian sports medical care and asserted her right to protect her body from further injury. To Elodie, the *laissez faire* attitude of her teammates and coach seemed like a less "evolved" response to a national team athlete's injury—a perspective gained from her experience of more sophisticated care in Canada.

Playing for Mauritius and going to the Island Games, Elodie observed the limitations imposed by scarce resources, but as a Western-trained athlete, the treatment of her injury elicited her criticism. Admittedly, Elodie had perpetually compared her existing Mauritian national team to her Canadian volleyball contexts, consciously and unconsciously, which in hindsight she said may have been unfair given the unequal access to resources. This incident attested to the way Elodie's performance had legitimized her presence, belonging, and necessity to the team, but it

[45] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.

also distinguished the quality of care and competition between Mauritius and Canada.[46] On her university team, Elodie had access to top physical therapists, athletic trainers, sports medicine doctors, kinesiologists, researchers, and other athletic support staff—resources that were not readily available on the Mauritian national team:[47]

> The rehab was hard because I don't think I had physio provided to me. The doctors in Mauritius were like, "yup, it's a tear." Didn't really give me any follow up. MCLs heal on their own, so that's a good thing and I kind of knew the process, having torn it before. But other than that, there was no support.[48]

Fortunately, Elodie had previous experience rehabilitating an MCL tear and managed to stay in Mauritius for a few extra months before going home in October 2007. Upon her return to Toronto, she saw Dr. Richards to properly mend her injury. In a private reflection of her indoor volleyball career for Mauritius she wrote, "the skills I have gained as a Varsity Blues has helped me overcome these things and continue on my journey."[49]

This low moment in Elodie's athletic career also challenged her faith as well as her resolve to pursue her Olympic dream. When a family friend—"aunty" Mirella—who was visiting Mauritius checked up on Elodie just prior to her move back to Toronto, Mirella too sensed Elodie's struggles:

> Mirella: She wanted to go to the Olympic Games, but she was struggling because she was a Christian. She didn't know how to handle this: whether she was putting God first, or sports first.
>
> Elodie: I think aunty Mirella was just affirming that if this is from God then He'll make it happen, and to pursue it, not to feel guilty. It was definitely encouraging 'cause I was definitely struggling.[50]

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[46] Elodie won an award for her performance throughout this tournament.
[47] Some national level players and athletes in Mauritius receive more resources than others. With a finite amount of funds, Mauritius' sport organizing committees need to carefully allocate funds to teams and individuals who are mostly likely to succeed. The Mauritian women's volleyball team were not known for their victories.
[48] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 22, 2017.
[49] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, "My Volleyball Experience," diary entry provided to the author, August 2017.
[50] Mirella Lam Hang and Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, July 7, 2017.

Mirella's spiritual support in this conversation was so significant that Elodie credits Mirella for helping her reconcile her athletic pursuits with her devotion to God. In this conversation, Mirella referenced the story of Eric Lidell from the famed British film *Chariots of Fire* as a way to assure Elodie that her athletic pursuits also honored God.

Unlike most of her teammates, Elodie had the means to propel herself into a higher level of international competition that required more time, money, and resources. Elodie's short career on Mauritius' national volleyball team gave her a modest sense of the volleyball landscape in the Indian Ocean region. It also prepared her for the impending uphill battles for support that she would need to become an Olympian. Interethnic challenges on the national team to her national, ethnic, athletic, and diasporic identities gave her a glimpse of future encounters in a larger international context. Elodie had not imagined leaving Mauritius with a ruptured MCL, nor with a ruptured sense of belonging to her country of birth.

Playing Beach Volleyball

Elodie returned to Toronto with a deep ambivalence about her experience in Mauritius. Worse, she had failed to find a beach volleyball partner. Virtually none of her national team peers had the time and resources necessary to train and compete as an Olympic hopeful. Elodie wondered whether her Olympic quest was over. She wondered whether it was in God's plan to make it to the Games, and whether she deserved to compete for Mauritius, considering her reception on the national team. But this was soon to change. Elodie had submitted a proposal to the volleyball federation of Mauritius stating her intention to qualify for the Olympics in beach volleyball and her need for a volleyball partner. The proposal eventually landed in the hands of Natacha Rigobert who was visiting Mauritius that summer in 2008. Natacha had been living in

southern France and had played pro volleyball in Europe.[51] She emailed Elodie to tell her she shared her ambition to go to the Olympics.[52] After a few phone calls, Elodie booked a ticket to France to train with Natacha for ten days and entered a tournament in Christensen, Norway to feel out the partnership. Elodie was still teaching in Toronto's public-school system so she only had the summers to meet up and compete with Natacha. But in 2010, Elodie decided to put her teaching career on hold. For the next two years, she would train and compete in France.

Unlike indoor volleyball that analogizes the relationship among players as familial, beach volleyball players liken the relationship with their beach partners to a marriage. In this partnership, Elodie not only sought an athlete skilled enough, but one who could share the financial responsibility and who could spend countless hours with her on the road, in hotels, at competition-related social functions, and on the court. The dependency between couples in this sport was exacerbated for Elodie and Natacha since the Mauritian federation had limited resources and personnel to support the pair, and due to the pair residing outside of Mauritius.

Considering the demands on time and resources, it was unsurprising that Elodie's beach volleyball partner was also a Western-educated and Western-trained athlete who was living in Europe. Natacha understood and could afford the lifestyle necessary to train as an Olympic hopeful. To a large extent, Elodie and Natacha came together by default; each could afford to put her life on hold. The pair also had complementary skills. Natacha was taller and more aggressive at the net. Elodie played with greater calm and defensive tact. They were one of the only African teams that sought out coaching and European competition to improve their skills—strategies

[51] "Natacha," *Mauritius Beach Volleyball* (blog), n.d., accessed July 3, 2018, https://beachvolleymri.wordpress.com/about-natacha/.
[52] The email landed in Elodie's spam folder. Elodie normally deletes her spam folder without checking it, but she decided to check it that summer and discovered Natacha's message. Elodie attributes discovering the email to God's work.

taken for granted among top global competitors. While Elodie and Natacha had complementary styles, their diasporic identities differed. Unlike Elodie, Natacha moved to France at the age of twenty for university,[53] married a Frenchman. Elodie described Natacha as a "light-skinned Créole"—a description that connoted more socioeconomic privilege than that of darker-skinned Créoles and black Mauritians.

While most of Elodie and Natacha's training and competition occurred outside of Africa, to qualify for the Olympics required the pair to progress through four stages of qualifying tournaments in Africa, and to win in the final stage (Appendix C). The Continental Beach Volleyball Cup (CBVC) developed for the first time for the London 2012 Olympics and spanned 2010 through 2012 to allot five Olympic spots to continental qualifiers from Africa, Asia/Oceania, Europe, North America, and South America, which the FIVB and the regional divisions oversaw (Appendix D). In addition to providing another pathway to the Olympics, the purpose of the CBVC was to develop beach volleyball worldwide and to generate opportunities for athletes to progress in the sport.[54] In Africa the Confederation Africaine de Volleyball (CAVB) divided thirty-five countries into five major groups by geography (Pool A, B, C, D, E) (Appendix E). The CAVB split these groups into ten sub-zones.[55] In order to compete in the Continental Cup, the rules stipulated that each country enter two sets of teams and win as a country, not as separate teams. This meant that Natacha and Elodie needed another Mauritian beach volleyball pair to represent the other half of Team Mauritius at every qualifying

[53] "Natacha," *Mauritius Beach Volleyball* (blog), n.d., accessed July 3, 2018, https://beachvolleymri.wordpress.com/about-natacha/.
[54] "CAVB Beach Volleyball Continental Cup," Fédération International de Volleyball, Formula, accessed September 27, 2017, http://www.fivb.org/EN/BeachVolleyball/Competitions/ContinentalCup/CAVB/Formula.asp.
[55] "CAVB Beach Volleyball Continental Cup," Fédération International de Volleyball, Pools, accessed September 27, 2017, http://www.fivb.org/EN/BeachVolleyball/Competitions/ContinentalCup/CAVB/Pools.asp.

tournament. Marjorie Nadal, Prisca Seerungen, and Heidy Bouda made up that second team.[56] Although only one of the two teams could participate in the Olympics, without these women, Elodie and Natacha never would have advanced to the Olympics.[57]

Touring Africa

With a complete Mauritian beach volleyball team, Elodie embarked on the two-year qualification journey alongside her new teammates. Elodie viewed competition through the Africa Continental Cup as a pathway through which she would progress to the Olympics. Within international competition, "home" typically signifies a geography bound by physical borders from which athletes compete as citizen-representatives. While she could easily declare citizenship, her African tour demonstrated that claiming Mauritius as "home" extended beyond geography and passports. As it turned out, Elodie had only begun to understand the complexities of representing Mauritius and, to a larger extent, Africa. Elodie could not escape the attention her Chinese ethnicity drew in a predominantly black African setting, or the questions about her right to represent Mauritius, or Africa as a whole. Elodie and Natacha, a mixed-raced and Western-trained pair, contended with identities both projected and inherent, which revolved around their race, nationality, residence in Europe, and color. The African tour prompted Elodie in particular to question the meanings of her diasporic heritage and experience.

Elodie's multi-diasporic subjectivity resisted what Adichie describes as a singular narrative of Africa—one that positions its subjects as black, uneducated, and poor. Elodie's claim to Africa through prior, African-born, generations of family reflected the continent's diversity. Yet Elodie's desire for recognition and inclusion through her Mauritian birthright also

[56] Heidy Bouda only played in the last tournament in place of Marjorie Nadal.
[57] Each country's National Olympic Committee has its own protocol to select and send teams to the Olympics. Elodie and Natacha were a clear choice between the four players, considering their dedication to training and competition, as well as their winning record.

unintentionally reproduced the dominant immigrant narratives of Canadian multiculturalism and inclusion that often mask power and privilege. Elodie brought a particular Canadian athletic gaze to her African competitions through her style of play, diasporic privileges, and judgments about tournament standards. She leveraged connections in Mauritius and Canada in ways that identified Elodie as a cultural outsider to the CAVB competitors, but an insider to the sport's American founding and Westernized norms.

In Elodie's journey to the Olympics, the concept of privilege was relative, and shifted based on her geography and interpersonal transactions. Her decision to compete on the basis of Mauritian citizenship reflected the reality that to compete for Canada was tougher and that beach volleyball in Africa was in its nascent stages—a perspective afforded through her immigration to Canada:

> The reality is I wasn't good enough to compete for Canada. There was an opportunity to represent through Mauritius and so I took that opportunity and made use of the fact that beach volleyball is not popular in Africa at all. It would have been equally nice to represent Canada, but I also like the fact that Mauritius not being known on the international scene, to make it known. It never crossed my mind that the African competition would be weak necessarily, it's just that they weren't as experienced. I didn't know what to expect from Africa because I know they have a lot of talented indoor players. But I did know they wouldn't be as experienced in beach volleyball.[58]

Elodie did not necessarily view her participation in the African circuit as wrong or unethical. Diasporic athletes commonly competed for their ancestral countries. Doing so also satisfied her desire to reconnect with her "roots." While Elodie remarked that "it would have been equally nice to represent Canada," she did not completely dismiss her African competitors. Although her primary goal was the Olympics, competing on behalf of Mauritius was not just a consolation prize. For Elodie, it was a privilege to represent her country of birth. She intended to use her athletic platform "to make [Mauritius] more widely known within and beyond Africa, and to

[58] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, December 27, 2013.

promote the sport with hopes of inspiring the next generation of African youth to participate. Intentions aside, Elodie's Canadian citizenship and the relatively higher socioeconomic status of Mauritius among continental African nations made Elodie an unlikely poster child to promote a more heterogeneous view of Africa—particularly one that included Mauritius and its diverse citizens. Furthermore, the ostracism that she experienced from the Mauritian national indoor team and her mixed reception at the exhibition tournament in Mauritius suggest that her athletic success would not necessarily uplift those less privileged.

On the continental circuit, the mix of Elodie and Natacha's ethnic and diasporic positionalities confused African competitors and organizers for whom Elodie and Natacha's racial heterogeneity and Mauritian nationality defined them as somehow less African. Still, the reception that they received differed depending upon the phase and location of the competition, as well as the participating countries. Team Mauritius' first round of continental qualification occurred in Windhoek, Namibia on January 21-23, 2011. Three countries participated: Mauritius, Republic of South Africa, and Namibia.[59] Elodie described her reception at the first qualification tournament as "not as bad" compared to the other tournaments, which she attributed to the racial makeup of the participants:

> The people there were white Germans, and the athletes themselves were white German Namibians. And the other teams participating were South Africans. I don't know how you would classify them but they have more of a multicultural society there I guess. It kind of felt welcoming. They also had similar styles of play.[60]

Elodie attributed the greater acceptance at the Namibian tournament to the "racial diversity" of the participants and spectators. This was also the tournament at which Elodie's ethnicity did not appear to jeopardize her "Africanness." In this setting, the Namibian hosts and players were

[59] All three teams moved on to the next phase of the continental qualifications.
[60] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.

predominantly white Germans, and the South African teams were multiracial—two nations with long histories of colonial violence, resulting in significant white settlement and mixed-raced populations. Her sense of comfort derived from a familiar Euro-American dominated setting of mainstream beach volleyball. Due to their own complex subjectivities in Africa, these were not the people who would question Elodie's Africanness. Furthermore, by virtue of her ethnicity, Elodie occupied an Asian settler position in Mauritius where the Chinese/black axis of privilege informed some of these perspectives. While Elodie was aware that the presence of white settlers in Africa derived from a violent colonial past, at the time, she did not see the paradox of the multicultural teams and her relative comfort in this "diverse" setting as vestiges of colonialism.

The next phase of the qualifications took a downward turn in the reception of Team Mauritius as "legitimate" African competitors. As Elodie recounted, her reception in Mozambique was more characteristic than Namibia of her tour in Africa. The tournament in Mozambique ran from July 15-17, 2011 and hosted Namibia, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe.[61] Mauritius came in second to the host team (Mozambique)—a loss Elodie attributed to impossible playing conditions and an unfriendly environment. I have asked her over the course of this project the source of the hostility that she and Natacha experienced. She remarked that it was not easy to pinpoint—it was a feeling, similar to the ambient sense of her racial oppression in Canada.[62] No one directly confronted Elodie to say that she did not belong or that she was not African enough. These were Elodie's conclusions. But both officials and players pointed out her privileges, and she felt that that in itself created

[61] From this tournament, Mozambique, Mauritius, South Africa, and Zimbabwe moved on to the next qualification tournament.

[62] She made this comparison several times over the course of this project saying that she had a hard time explaining her experiences with racism in Canada to her white colleagues, when they asked why Elodie keeps bringing up issues of race.

hostility around the pair's presence. She felt that such comments fueled the unfair assumption that she and Natacha had not earned their spot. By the time of the Mozambique tournament, players and officials knew that Elodie and Natacha had been training in France and competing on the FIVB world tour. Few, if any other, African teams were competing outside of Africa:

> Elodie: Our style of play was different, and I think that was felt…that we had some sort of privilege not to be from [Africa].
>
> Yuka: And where was it coming from?
>
> Elodie: I think it was top down. It felt like the rules were constantly changing. I remember in Mozambique being upset with how they had done the draw or maybe it was Nigeria. It just didn't make sense logically. And it definitely felt like it wasn't favored toward us and there were sly comments like, "you know it's not the FIVB?" Comments of our privilege and the experiences that we've had.
>
> Yuka: And these comments came from…
>
> Elodie: … the delegates, the African officials that were there.[63]

The African officials' critique of the pair's participation in the FIVB only intensified after this tournament in Mozambique. When I asked why Team Mauritius came in second place, Elodie recalled the hazardous winds that uprooted an umbrella with a concrete base that flew onto Natacha's foot, injuring her just before the finals. Elodie also felt that the Mozambique team was simply better adapted to the weather. Officials refused to wait until the playing conditions improved:

> During the tournament in Mozambique it was crazy windy and dangerous. Yet we were still forced to play. The rules state to stop playing after winds go over 100 kilometers and it was 110.[64]

[63] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.
[64] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.

When on several occasions, Elodie and Natacha asked tournament officials to abide by the rules, officials pegged the pair as elitist and "difficult." Not surprisingly, Elodie and Natacha were resented for their relative privilege of their position:

> I can't remember any specifics, but there was this feeling that we were looked at being privileged. We did have a level of privilege because we were able to go to these international tournaments. But it would be little comments like, "Oh we're not like you, we can't afford, or we don't have the same access to, or it's not as easy for us to go to these tournaments." Or "It's not the FIVB here, so stop your complaining. We don't run the tournaments the same. It's hard to." Things like that.[65]

While most of the hostility came from officials, fellow competitors lamented to Elodie their own inability to access higher-level training and competition outside of Africa. Elodie recognized that she had advantages that afforded her access to international tournaments, but she disliked how it was used to silence her "complaints."

Elodie's insistence on advocating for the improvement of athletes' conditions derived from the stark contrast between her experience in the FIVB or at the University of Toronto and in the African circuit, which in her view had room for improvement. In addition to hazardous weather and unfavorable "draws" that allowed little time for rest and recovery between matches, Elodie criticized the tournament's lack of attention to athlete nutrition:

> So, I guess that part of exercising those rights, we didn't get food on time and I was like, "this is not healthy. We're playing and you said the food was going to be here at twelve, it needs to be here at twelve because we're planning around those things."[66]

Elodie and Natacha prioritized keeping a good routine, and "knowing when to eat, or what to eat to perform optimally."[67] Elodie's training in Canada and undergraduate degree in Physical Education and Health had prepared her to care for her body during intense athletic training. She expected tournament organizers to consider the nutritional needs of the participating athletes,

[65] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.
[66] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.
[67] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.

which she felt the Mozambique planners had not. Elodie's expectations around athletes' need and rights derived from her Western athletic experiences.[68] It seems likely that this style of assertive conduct contributed to her distance from her less privileged competitors.

Elodie was also conscious that her and Natacha's race and lighter skin color set them as privileged outsiders. In North America and Europe, she explained, whiteness represented the norm in her sport, but at the time her desire to "just get by" superseded any critical thinking of the sport's whiteness. She also had a general awareness that in Africa, whiteness not only represented the sport's dominant athletes, but also conjured histories of colonialism and oppression. Given this knowledge, at times Elodie herself questioned what kind of African Olympic qualifier she would make. Other than the South African and Namibian teams, Elodie noticed that the athletes from most teams generally were black Africans. Elodie and Natacha were the most visibly multiracial team:

> We don't look typically African. I'm Chinese and Natacha is lighter-skinned. So, we look like we might not be from [Africa]… I think most of the other countries, their representatives were African-looking.[69]

Elodie had previously referred to the majority of players as "African-looking," which to Elodie meant racially black. While Elodie resisted this notion of a mono-racial black Africa, she consistently assumed that not looking "African enough" meant that she did not look black enough to represent the continent. This, in turn, she linked to the relationship between lighter skin and privilege.

The South African team served as an interesting counter-point to our conversation about colorism, privilege, and African representativeness. Although the South Africans—like Elodie and Natacha—have historically participated in training and competition outside of the continent,

[68] According to Elodie, athletes from South Africa and Namibia also vocalized similar complaints.
[69] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.

Elodie argued that the South African team did not endure the same level of suspicion and scrutiny as Team Mauritius. As she put it:

> …people know more of [South Africa's] history than Mauritius. So, they know that there are coloured people, white people, black people [in South Africa] but most of the people there who play volleyball are coloured or white.[70]

In Elodie's view, the coloured and white South African players were regarded as having privilege too, but they were not seen as outside of the African body due to the country's geography and diverse population, despite its infamous history of apartheid. Furthermore, South Africa had established their place at the Olympics as the only African nation ever to send female beach volleyball athletes.[71]

Elodie explained that the prominence of Asiatic ties in Mauritius may have further positioned her outside of the African body. While both South Africa and Mauritius are known as wealthier African nations with more privileged players, South Africa is on the African continent and perceived as an African nation. By contrast, the island nation of Mauritius refashioned itself from the era of decolonization as the ambassador of diasporic Asian capitalist ideology in Africa. The country appealed to Asian investors and contracted another wave of Chinese laborers to work in the EPZs in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This wave of Chinese migrant laborers to Mauritius dovetailed with an expansion of China-Africa trade relations and an increased presence of Chinese elsewhere in Africa—a trend that not all in the continent embraced.[72] This recent group of Chinese migrants to Mauritius challenged the identities of previous generations of Chinese Africans who had staked a claim to national belonging through ties to the era of indenture. While these laborers carry few cultural markers of difference from Mauritians, a 2005

[70] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.
[71] South Africa sent women's teams in 2004 and 2008. In 2016, Egypt sent a women's team for the first time.
[72] Kingsley Ighobor, "China in the Heart of Africa," *Africa Renewal,* January 15, 2013, http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/january-2013/china-heart-africa.

public protest among Chinese laborers elicited xenophobic responses. With increasing unemployment, nationals harbored fear and anger toward migrant laborers.[73] This recent history complicated Elodie's quest to compete as a representative of Mauritius and the African continent with claims through birthright.

All-Africa Games

If African competitors and officials viewed Mauritius as outside of the continental body, then Elodie and Natacha's gold medal win at the All-Africa Games (AAG) reinserted Mauritius in Africa's athletic landscape. The pair had returned to Mozambique to compete during September 3-11, 2011. Their choice was a strategic one. The AAG, born in the era of African decolonization, had long symbolized African unity. The first games were held in Brazzaville, Congo in the summer of 1965.[74] Today, it exists as one of the largest regional games with fifty-four National Olympic Committees participating throughout its history.[75] With its higher profile and grandeur, Elodie and Natacha used the tournament to gain visibility not just with other African competitors, but within Mauritius.

Elodie and Natacha both had to earn legitimacy on the Mauritian national team, and they won the right to represent the country with their gold medal performance at the All-Africa Games. This victory changed the course of their reception in Mauritius and opened opportunities. Elodie and Natacha received prize money from their win, and Mauritius recognized them

[73] Lincoln, "Beyond the Plantation," 72.
[74] Daniel Bell, *Encyclopedia of International Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 25. The AAG was an original vision of Pierre de Coubertin since the 1920s, but colonial powers stepped in to cancel the games in fear of African unity. Some sports use the AAG for qualification to the Olympics. This was the not the case for beach volleyball in the 2012 Olympic lead-up.
[75] Early on the AAG faced organizational issues, economic hardships, postponements, and coups. With repeat postponement of the fourth games in Nairobi, Kenya, China stepped in to help build the stadium. China along with corporate sponsors like Boeing and Coca-Cola helped to fund the event, and since then the AAG has occurred every four years. Bell, *Encyclopedia of International Games,* 27.

through awards—some of which came with cash.[76] At the airport in Mauritius TV film crews, fans, family, and government officials eagerly awaited the pair's triumphant return. Drummers beat their instruments in the airport's arrival section, welcoming home their athletic champions (Figure 3.1). The pair fielded interview questions surrounded by a camera crew against the backdrop of a large action poster of Elodie and Natacha emblazoned with the words "Bravo & Merci."[77] In their "victory tour," Elodie and Natacha appeared on a popular variety show sporting their gold medals and participating in jovial banter with the show's host. In an article covering the pair's victory, *Le Mauricien* wrote, *"Merci à Natacha et à Élodie d'avoir mis Maurice et le beach-volley sur le toit de l'Afrique."* (Thank you to Natacha and to Elodie for putting Mauritius and beach volleyball on top of Africa.) Media coverage of the pair as Olympic hopefuls increased. Mauritian news coverage as well as the FIVB press releases about African competitions began to refer to Elodie and Natacha as the "All-Africa Games gold medalists."

Figure 3.2 Team Mauritius' homecoming at the airport after AAG victory.[78]
(beachvolleymri.wordpress.com)

[76] They won "Team of the Year" in the 2011 Mauritian Sports Hall of Fame. Barclays Bank sponsored the Mauritian delegation to the Africa Games and awarded the medalists with money. "10es Jeux d'Afrique: Barclays Bank récompense les médaillés," *Le Mauricien*, September 22, 2011, https://www.lemauricien.com/article/10es-jeux-dafrique-barclays-bank-r%C3%A9compense-les-m%C3%A9daill%C3%A9s/.
[77] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, September 22, 2017.
[78] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Natacha Rigobert, "X Jogos Africanos – Gold!," *Mauritius Beach Volleyball* (blog), September 19, 2011, https://beachvolleymri.wordpress.com/2011/09/19/x-jogos-africanos-gold/.

While winning the AAG in women's beach volleyball reflected positively on the pair in Mauritius, Elodie and Natacha's growing prominence in the CAVB intensified critique of their presence in the remaining two Olympic qualification rounds. Despite their win, Elodie continued to endure taunting and questions about her legitimacy as a Mauritian just as she had while playing on the Mauritian national team. About seven months after the AAG, Elodie and Natacha had returned to Mauritius to participate in exhibition matches during the men's Continental Cup finals that the country was hosting in April of 2012. Elodie heard spectators taunting them:

> They were like, "*Allez Canada, allez France,*" ("go Canada, go France") not realizing that we were born [in Mauritius] and we are Mauritians. We had to explain to our own people that we are Mauritians.[79]

On-lookers called Elodie the "Canadian girl," stripping her of a Mauritian identity. Coupled with her ethnicity, few, if any, players perused competitive beach volleyball in Mauritius. The structure of the sport required more individual dedication and resources than team sports since the country's volleyball federation did not fund or recognize beach volleyball in its organization.[80] The novelty of the sport in Mauritius also meant that participants needed to find and fund their competitive season outside of the country. Elodie embodied privileges that made her foreign to spectators on the basis of ethnicity, class, and emigration.[81]

Elodie, too, felt as though she had lost some of her Mauritian identity through emigrating to Canada, although she relied on birthright in her claim to represent the nation. Not all agreed. Exhausted from playing and traveling, Elodie could not bring herself to blog about this trip on

[79] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, March 26, 2013.
[80] Elodie observed that coaches discouraged indoor players from playing beach volleyball in fear that coaches will lose their players. Elodie had helped petition to the ministry of sport in Mauritius to fund and recognize beach volleyball, with little success.
[81] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, April 10, 2013.

her website that chronicled Team Mauritius' international tour.[82] Nor did she want to. The heckling triggered pain that lingered from her post-graduation homecoming four years earlier. Though now a gold medalist and competing internationally for a different sport with more compassionate teammates, this return to Mauritius reminded Elodie of the ongoing challenge of representing her "home" country in athletics.

Qualifying for the Olympics

Elodie's qualifying tournaments in the latter half of 2011 and the first half of 2012 underscored her deep suspicion that she and Natacha were perceived as "mainstream" beach volleyball players who were taking advantage of the African circuit to advance their own Olympic ambitions. Elodie never denied that trying to qualify for the Olympics through the African trials was easier versus the North American trials. She knew the path through Africa would significantly increase her chances of becoming an Olympian. However, for Elodie, the opportunity to represent Mauritius through Africa extended beyond individual ambition. She desired a platform to represent her country of birth and its rich histories. She felt proud to represent Mauritius. But the pair's dominance in Africa, their gold medal performance in the AAG, and their standing as world ranked competitors seemed to reinforce their reputation as athletic opportunists. During the third round of the continental qualifications in Nigeria, Elodie questioned whether officials had altered the rules in an effort to "level the playing field." This third round took place in Abuja, Nigeria over the course of three days from October 28-30, 2011. Here as in Mozambique, the playing conditions were extreme, but in Nigeria the equatorial heat, rather than wind, beat down on players and spectators. In these conditions, tournament officials placed Elodie and Natacha into a bracket that forced them to play back-to-back without rest. To

[82] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Natacha Rigobert, *Mauritius Beach Volleyball* (blog), https://beachvolleymri.wordpress.com/.

further raise Elodie's suspicions, the players from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) came a day late to the tournament but were still permitted to play. Due to their late arrival, officials placed them in a smaller pool of three. As a result, DR Congo did not have to play any back-to-back matches. To Elodie, the way the teams were drawn simply did not make sense.[83] In the finals, Elodie and Natacha came to head with Team DR Congo. Team Mauritius lost by the smallest margin possible: 13-15 in a golden set.

Elodie had entered the pan-African competitions with a general sense that she could capitalize on the region's less developed beach volleyball program to qualify for the Olympics. To her, this was an athletic strategy much like how a coach would match up players in a starting lineup. Beach volleyball teams often scheduled their season around tournaments that would bolster their rankings. To persist in her Olympic quest, Elodie had divorced her competitive pursuit from the disparities of her regional competitors. In her view, meddling with the rules or structure of the game in anyway constituted a violation to the sport's integrity. At the time, the (suspected) injustice blinded her from seeing the way the structure of the sport had reinforced inequalities that enabled her advantageous position. The loss to DR Congo bothered Elodie enough to warrant an email update to her supporters:

> The tournament rules happened to change as well and we found out at the meeting. It was really hard to not get upset about these changes because we truly feel they changed the rules to benefit certain countries and hurt others. It was unfair but couldn't do anything about it. [W]e have to be thankful and grateful that we were able to survive a hot tiring draw and made it to the next round…Praise the Lord for his guidance and strength.[84]

Here Elodie positioned herself as the victim in this scenario, and in so doing obscured her privilege. While interfering with established rules arguably did erode the integrity of the sport, this incident demonstrates the way beach volleyball functioned as a contested space. Elodie had

[83] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, April 10, 2013.
[84] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, email to Christian supporters from France, November 13, 2011, in the author's possession.

also endured the rules and culture of competitive volleyball in Canada that denied any acknowledgement of the structural obstacles to her participation. But the zero-sum nature of qualifying for the Olympics did not leave room for Elodie to draw an empathetic connection to her competitors. Up until this point, Elodie's blog posts and communication to supporters refrained from "complaints."[85] But Elodie was admittedly flustered by the changes in the rules, and the loss to a team she felt that they should have defeated. Emphasizing the upset, The CAVB press release headline of the event read, "DR Congo women cinch gold against All Africa Games champs."[86] Despite the loss, both Mauritius and Congo advanced to the final qualification tournament.

A recent discussion with Elodie about the losing match against DR Congo revealed a subtle way that Elodie's experience with "mainstream" styles of beach volleyball informed her perspectives on Africa's developing beach program. In her view, "they weren't even playing beach volleyball."[87] The other team kept putting the ball over in two, rather than the usual bump-set-attack formation. The DR Congo team successfully threw off Elodie and Natacha who were not accustomed to this style of play. While there was nothing illegal about putting the ball over in two touches, elite beach volleyball players—including Elodie—generally considered this strategy unsophisticated. The team's playing style did not necessarily represent the playing style of most African teams; however, their style was condoned in the Nigerian tournament and proved successful. To Elodie, familiar with the style of play of the FIVB, this kind of play did not constitute "real" volleyball.

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[85] Elodie Li Yuk Lo and Natacha Rigobert, "Mozambique Results," *Mauritius Beach Volleyball* (blog), August 11, 2011, https://beachvolleymri.wordpress.com/2011/08/11/mozambique-results/.
[86] Fédération International de Volleyball, "DR Congo Women Cinch Gold Against All Africa Games Champs," press release, November 3, 2011, accessed September 27, 2017, http://www.fivb.org/EN/BeachVolleyball/Competitions/ContinentalCup/CAVB/viewPressRelease.asp?No=32785.
[87] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, September 22, 2017.

In addition, aesthetic norms within the African circuit situated Elodie as an outsider to African competitors but an insider to the sport. She recognized how the bikini requirement prevented many women and girls from participating in Africa:

> [P]eople would just avoid the sport completely, especially in continents like Africa. Predominantly, the people playing the sport are Europeans or North Americans, where the bikini has been normalized in that area of the world.[88]

Although Elodie knew how the uniform excluded certain women on the basis of culture and religion, at the time Elodie was more focused on her athletic ambitions and saw the bikini as one of several personal obstacles she could overcome. On the FIVB and the world tour, the bikini was a standard uniform, although regulations permitted one-piece bathing suits. Regulations at the time also permitted tight fitting long sleeves and pants if the temperature dropped. However, tournament organizers set the threshold for cold. Up until the 2012 Olympics, female players opting for the bikini versus the one-piece needed to wear bottoms with a sideband no wider than seven centimeters.[89] That rule changed for London, which allowed shorts no longer than three centimeters above the knee and sleeved or sleeveless tops. Continental qualification tournaments had already implemented this new rule.[90]

Virtually all female players in the mainstream FIVB circuit wore a bikini during competition, except during colder weather. Conversely, African competitors typically wore shorts and a tank top or more modest uniforms. The contrast in uniform marked more modestly-dressed global participants as "outsiders" through the narrow physical and hypersexualized

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[88] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, September 22, 2017.
[89] "Official Beach Volleyball Tournaments Specific Competition Regulations," Fédération International de Volleyball, July 13, 2004, accessed November 14, 2017, http://www.fivb.org/EN/BeachVolleyBall/Competitions/Olympics/WATH2004/2004%20Specific%20Events%20Regulations.pdf.
[90] "London 2012 Olympics: Female Beach Volleyball Players Permitted to Wear Less Revealing Uniforms," *Telegraph* (UK), March 27, 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/volleyball/9169429/London-2012-Olympics-female-beach-volleyball-players-permitted-to-wear-less-revealing-uniforms.html.

aesthetics of the sport. America's Kerry Walsh-Jennings—three-time Olympic medalist and global icon of the sport—publicly defended the bikini uniform as "the original way to play beach volleyball," as well for its ability to enhance performance.[91] Walsh-Jennings personifies the idealized female beach volleyball athlete who is white, blond, and modelesque—a model most closely achieved by the Namibian team and a former South African team in the African circuit. As one of the few who wore bikinis to play, Elodie and Natacha embodied visual markers of Western "legitimacy" through the bikini uniform. The bikini uniform thus functioned in contradictory ways: first, to legitimate Elodie and Natacha as "mainstream" insiders to the sport; and second, to cast the pair as elite outsiders of the regional culture of beach volleyball in Africa.

Elodie disliked wearing the bikini, and she was not required to wear it for her African competitions. Nonetheless, she did so, reflecting the influence of Western practices of bodily display in women's sport. To Elodie, acquiescing to her sport's aesthetic was a familiar extension of her practice since high school:[92]

> I was just focusing on what I was actually out there to do. The uniform was just part of the sport and I had to come to terms with that to be able to play the sport I love, so much that once you get out on the court really everything else is a factor that you try not to think about. I know it was a factor that I couldn't control so I had to really focus on the things that I could control, which was my game and my play.[93]

On several occasions, Elodie remarked that she would rather focus on the parts of the games that she could control, by which she meant the actual playing of the game. Undoubtedly, most of her conversations with Natacha and her other Mauritian teammates were about game strategies. While Elodie mentioned that she simply accepted wearing the bikini as part of the game, that did

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[91] Karly Ledbetter, "Kerry Walsh-Jennings Shuts Down Beach Volleyball Bikini Critics," *Huffington Post*, May 5, 2016, last modified July 26, 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/kerri-walsh-jennings-shuts-down-beach-volleyball-bikini-critics_us_5727bf4ae4b016f378933897.
[92] In chapter 2 I discuss Elodie's negotiation with the sexualized uniform, particularly the spandex tights.
[93] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, April 10, 2013.

not prevent her from having conversations with her teammates about body image and not feeling fit enough to wear a bikini uniform.[94] Elodie was now an experienced player, accustomed to wearing the bikini. She did not find it uncomfortable; in fact, she felt that it provided greater freedom of movement. Spectators' reactions, however, created discomfort:

> It's just easier to move around, not like appearance comfort because I didn't feel comfortable in the bikini but like movement-wise and it's just easier, functionally, to play in. But I mean it was uncomfortable 'cause I don't think people [in Africa] are used to seeing women running around in their bikinis. There was just a lot of staring and jeers.[95]

Despite Elodie's attempts to block the unwanted attention that the bikini drew, the "staring and jeers" made her self-conscious. Elodie and Natacha's participation in these norms furthered their mainstream status. Compounded with their lighter skin and willingness to display their bodies in the image of overt Western female sexuality, they enhanced their reputation as Western outsiders or opportunists of the African circuit. The bikini uniform served as one of the ways Elodie advantageously navigated the structure of the sport in ways that encouraged the exclusion of others.

Victory and Violence

While the sport's bikini uniform divided players within the competition, the tournament locations and set up of these events separated the competitors from political conflict and social inequality in the surrounding areas. For Elodie, the simultaneous proximity and isolation that she experienced in relation to the broader social world opened an internal conflict over the validity of her Olympic and social ambitions. International sporting events often occupied spaces of political conflict, even as organizers attempted to hide it from the view of both athletes and spectators. For instance, just ten days prior to the 1968 opening of the Mexico Olympic Games,

[94] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, April 10, 2013.
[95] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.

Mexican government troops fired upon three thousand student demonstrators and residents in Tlatelolco, just fifteen miles from the Olympic Village. Most athletes remained largely unaware. For American athletes, the Federal Bureau of Investigation had tightly controlled information about the massacre, discretely sharing certain details only with "responsible officials" of the United States.[96] In 2010, Canada's National Olympic Committee built and expanded venues on unauthorized Aboriginal spaces, ignoring the demands of the "No Olympics on Stolen Native Lands" movement. Further, it appropriated an Inuit symbol—the Inukshuk—as the event's official logo,[97] glossing over enduring disputes between Canada's First Nations and the government. Most recently, in preparation for the 2016 Rio Olympics, land developers contracted for the Games evicted more than twenty thousand families from the city's favelas to build the Olympic Village, stadium projects, and transportation routes. Much of this event took place on land embroiled in histories of violence and crime.[98] The structure of international sporting events sequestered athletes, fabricating a sanitized version of international comradery and interaction unencumbered by the violence and displacement unfolding in proximity to the competition.

In Africa, Elodie, too, was insulated from the tragedies of the surrounding region. But in the final qualification round, glimpses of the social and political conflicts within the host country and surrounding venue penetrated Elodie's armor. The tournament in Rwanda that ran from May 24-25, 2012—bringing Elodie closer to her Olympic dream—incited complex feelings about her Olympic ambitions, her role as an African competitor, and her "Africanness":

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[96] Bass, *Not the Triumph,* 125.
[97] Tyler Dusanek, "Canada First Nations Challenge Government Over Stolen Land (Vancouver Olympics) 2010," Global Nonviolent Action Database*,* last modified November 25, 2013, https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/canada-first-nations-challenge-government-over-stolen-land-vancouver-olympics-2010.
[98] Alex Cuadros, "The Broken Promise of the Rio Olympics," *Atlantic*, August 1, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/08/building-barra-rio-olympics-brazil/493697/.

> I felt like I wasn't socially responsible. I was just focused on the game and now that I think back to the tournament, I was like, "Oh, that's why there were so many military men around." I just thought that that was more or less a normal part of the tournament in Rwanda. I was really upset at my ignorance because I was scared going to Rwanda. All that I knew about it was from watching the movie *Hotel Rwanda* and not really understanding the history of what happened there. I think that was part of my ignorance of not being aware of [what was] taking place during the time I was there, but more so being focused on the tournament itself.[99]

On route to the tournament site, Elodie passed what looked like a temporary community of people living in rows of cabins enclosed with a fence. The driver informed her that it was a refugee camp, which confused her. Elodie, like much of the world, had seen on the television screens horrifying images of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda—the murder of at least half a million ethnic Tutsis at the hands of militant Hutus.[100] But for Elodie, as for much of the Western world, those images had faded. From Elodie's perspective, the genocide was history; it lived in the past. In fact, it lived on.

The instability following the mass genocide had led to the first Congo War in 1996, and the second Congo War in 1998. Although that war officially ended in 2003, tension at the Rwandan-Congo border persisted, particularly at sites rich in minerals, diamonds, timber, and other natural resources.[101] In March of 2012, just two months shy of the Continental Cup finals in Rwanda, a new rebel group—the M23—became increasingly active in eastern DR Congo. The government of DR Congo had accused Rwanda of supporting the M23, which had launched a destructive insurgency that swept through DR Congo's city of Goma months later.[102] Astonishingly, during this time of insurgent conflict, tournament organizers had set up beach

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[99] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, September 27, 2017.
[100] Some estimates report 800,000-1,000,000 killed, which includes Tutsi sympathizers and moderate Hutus. "Democratic Republic of Congo," World Without Genocide, accessed November 14, 2017, http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/congo.
[101] World Without Genocide, "Democratic Republic of Congo."
[102] "Q & A: DR Congo Conflict," *BBC,* November 20, 2012, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-11108589.

courts and modest seating in Gisenyi, a city on the northwestern rim of Rwanda that shares a border with Goma on the north shore of Lake Kivu. While beach resorts and hotels lined Gisenyi, just thirty minutes away, genocidal violence pushed refugees across the Congo border into Rwanda.

The on-going violence at the Rwanda-Congo border received far less attention from the press than the 1994 genocide.[103] Elodie was unaware of the ongoing violence prior to this visit due in part to her intense focus on training and competition, as well as less global coverage of the issue. Instead, she had subscribed unwittingly to what Adichie calls "a singular story" of Rwanda's "underdeveloped" status and genocidal past. Elodie's experience touring Africa, vying for continental representation, exposed her limited knowledge of the countries she visited. Elodie reflected on a tournament in Nigeria, prior to her competition in Rwanda, and said, "I just felt like we were going to the country to [compete] but not being aware of what was going on."[104] Just after Elodie had left Nigeria, a church that she had visited was bombed. Her experiences in Nigeria and Rwanda raised for her questions about the broader meaning of her purpose and presence in these spaces.

The proximity to war and poverty exacerbated the enormity of Elodie's sense of difference in the Continental Trials. Her tournament in Rwanda—unlike those in Europe or North America—brought her face-to-face with elements of the country's socioeconomic inequalities and political violence:

> Somebody came up to me and said, "Oh, I noticed that you eat between your games." I was like, "Yeah, you need to keep your energy levels up while you're playing." And he was like, "I haven't eaten in a few days, would you mind giving me some?" That just kind of like struck me. I was just eating to sustain myself to play and this guy hasn't had

[103] Armin Rosen, "The Origins of War in the DRC," *Atlantic*, June 26, 2013, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/the-origins-of-war-in-the-drc/277131/.
[104] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, September 27, 2017.

> food to sustain himself to *live*. I gave him some of my food, but still, I was like, "come back afterward, I still kind of need it for my games, but if I have any left, I'd love to give it all to you." After one of the games, I had a granola bar or two left in my bag and I gave it to some kids and they fought over it. The older kids were beating up the younger ones just to have a piece of the food. One kid grabbed my granola bar and ran away because he knew that there were so many other people coming after him.[105]

Elodie had never seen that level of poverty in either Mauritius or in Canada. Despite the poverty that existed in those countries, she recalled, "there was still a [degree] of access to food." In Mozambique, as well as in Rwanda, people clamored around the tournament site asking players for food. But competitions did not feel to Elodie like the right time or place to embark on a social mission. Whatever her hopes of changing dominant American narratives about Mauritius and Africa on her international tour, she had entered the tournament with eyes set on the Olympics, not on outreach. As the final match that would determine her berth to the Games approached, Elodie was overcome with excitement and nerves. Her mental training kicked in. She focused her energy on each ball in play, and little else. During the match, she did not allow the skeptics to penetrate her concentration. Neither did she indulge her guilt over "eating to play" versus eating to live. She did not even think about the refugee camps she passed along the way to the tournament site. She just concentrated on the match. They won.

Elodie and Natacha had fought for their berth to the 2012 Olympics in a golden set match against Kenya. Elodie was elated and relieved. To celebrate, the pair took a victory swim in Lake Kivu, although they thought it strange that no one else was swimming. Their post-victory idyll did not last long. A passerby urged Elodie and Natacha to get out immediately. Corpses may have been floating in the water—carnage from the violence at the Rwanda-Congo border. At the time, Elodie could barely register the gravity of what had just been said. Her body had not yet settled from the adrenaline of the match and the victory. But this incident post-victory would

[105] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, September 27, 2017.

later erode Elodie's idealized vision of an international global community of athletes, and prompt reflection on the realities of the people in the continent to which Elodie did—and did not—belong.

Later that night the Mauritian federation president treated Elodie and Natacha to a sumptuous dinner held in the upscale hotel that housed the officials and delegates participating in the tournament. The hotel's grandeur and proximity to the tournament site made Elodie wonder momentarily why the athletes stayed in such basic accommodations further from the venue. This was the first time Elodie observed directly how institutional representatives profited from the labor of international athletes.[106] At the time, she did not criticize the officials' extravagance, nor did she connect their luxurious lifestyles with the poverty and suffering that she had witnessed down the road. Exhausted from the tournament and the years of personal effort to achieve her Olympic dream, Elodie pushed aside any thoughts that may have detracted from her triumph, and relished her victory meal. She had not yet begun to process how making it to the Games stood in sharp relief against a backdrop of political violence and social inequality, nor was she trained to cope with the complexity of the disparities she had witnessed.

Safely on route back to southern France, Elodie did begin to reflect on the heavily armed personnel at the event's venue. During the tournament, she had thought little of their presence. To her, it was just part of the security detail, like at the All-Africa Games. Recently, I asked Elodie if knowing about the conflict would have changed anything about her mindset or behavior at the Continental Cup finals. She replied:

> That's a good question. I guess not in terms of playing, but I might have been a little more apt to be like, "Can we go visit the camp? Is there a way to bring awareness to the

[106] This is a pervasive practice across delegations. It is not unique to Mauritius. Chapter four further addresses the issues and tensions between athletes and their national Olympic committees, situated within the sociopolitical and economic contexts of the Games.

> situation?" Maybe reflect a little bit more on how to use the platform that we have in playing to bring awareness. But I mean, that's me saying it now after years of growing and maturing. Not sure if I'd actually would have done that at the time.[107]

Elodie's concern for outreach derived from individual motivation. Unlike Tommie Smith and John Carlos in the 1968 Olympics, Elodie was thinking about raising awareness from a position of relative privilege rather than speaking out about systemic oppression. At no point during the competition did organizers formally recognize or educate athletes about the neighboring conflict. Neither could Elodie find obvious pathways to "use the platform" to raise awareness. This was not a period in which she allowed herself to contemplate the separation between sports and the broader world—a separation that sport itself perpetuated. Only through insulating athletes and audiences from the broader world could international sport organizations successfully promote the ideology of meritocracy and multicultural harmony. Perhaps the tournament provided temporary distraction from the area's violent reality in the form of athletic entertainment. Recognizing the paradox of sport at sites of conflict would jeopardize the fiction of international athletics as purveyors of global peace.

Elodie did not share her experiences in Rwanda with many people either at the time or in the years that followed. Briefly after the tournament she had prayed privately for peace in the region, but the relentless disciplining of her body and enduring commitment to the Olympic goal had consumed most of Elodie's energy. In recent reflections, Elodie has conveyed that her silence during that time expressed yet another tension: her goals as an athlete sometimes clashed with her sense of responsibility as a role model. While not all athletes view themselves as role models, Elodie did. Regardless of personal desires, her actions and omissions were in the public

[107] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, September 27, 2017.

eye. After her victory, she did what most others would likely have done in a similar position; she basked in the glory of achieving a lifelong dream.

The media coverage of Elodie and Natacha's victory served as another gloss over the atrocities just outside the women's beach volleyball Olympic qualification tournament in Rwanda. The Mauritian media on behalf of the country expressed pride and support for Mauritius' first beach volleyball team to go to the Olympics without mentioning the region's on-going violence. The Mauritian Minister of Sport, Devanand Ritoo, shared with the media: *"Élodie et Natacha ont fait le sacrifice nécessaire pour réussir dans cette tâche. Je suis surtout heureux pour elles et pour cette qualification historique après la médaille d'or historique des Jeux d'Afrique à Maputo."*[108] ("Elodie and Natacha made the sacrifice necessary to succeed in this task. I am especially happy for them and for this historic qualification after the historic gold medal at the Africa Games in Maputo.") Despite the pair's complex positionality in the country's racial landscape, after the gold medal, the Mauritian media and administration claimed them.[109]

Unlike the Mauritian media, the CAVB coverage did not laud Team Mauritius for their victory. Instead, the CAVB's coverage of the Continental Cup finals seemed to validate Elodie's suspicions that her athletic style, race, and diasporic history marked her as insufficiently "African." Four CAVB press release articles that chronicled the final tournament in Rwanda included pictures of black athletes only, despite the fact that three of the four headlines included the word "Mauritius" (Figures 3.3 through 3.6). Although no one country or pair of athletes

[108] "Beach Volley: Elodie Li Yuk et Natacha Rigobert En Route Pour les JO de Londres," *Le Mauricien,* May 27, 2012, http://www.lemauricien.com/article/beach-volley-elodie-li-yuk-et-natacha-rigobert-en-route-les-jo-londres. Translation Elodie Li Yuk Lo and the author.

[109] Elodie asserted that even after her berth to the Olympics, she sensed that non-media and non-officials in Mauritius critiqued the pair as appropriate representatives for the country. She got this sense from rumors that circulated among her athletic and interpersonal circles in Mauritius. Prior to their AAG and Continental Cup victories, the media and officials largely ignored the pair, but never derided them.

could characterize an entire continent, the first headline for the final tournament read: "Thrills increase as Africa determines its Olympic representative" (Figure 3.3).[110] Conversely, headlines from other Continental Cup regions did not describe their tournaments as a quest for its continental representative for the London Games. All regions other than Africa benefited from a heterogeneous view of the countries and politics that made up those continents. Furthermore, the CAVB press release ramping up for the final match between Kenya and Mauritius featured a picture of the Kenyan team engaging in a crowd of their supporters (Figure 3.5).[111] Significantly, none of the four press releases covering the African Continental Cup included a photograph of Elodie and Natacha. Even the final article with headline: "Mauritius books ticket to London following CAVB Continental Cup victory" failed to feature a picture of Elodie and Natacha. Instead, the photo and quotes featured the Mozambique women who won bronze in the tournament (See Figure 3.6).[112] The CAVB also erased the broader social circumstances surrounding the tournament site. The pictures of athletic women, smiling as representatives of their countries, visually divorced the sport from its contested surroundings.

[110] Fédération International de Volleyball, "Thrills Increase as Africa Determines Its Olympic Representative," press release, May 26, 2012, accessed September 27, 2017, http://www.fivb.org/EN/BeachVolleyball/Competitions/ContinentalCup/CAVB/viewPressRelease.asp?No=34850.
[111] Fédération International de Volleyball, "Kenya and Mauritius Set to Contest CAVB Continental Cup Final," press release, May 25, 2012, accessed September 27, 2017, http://www.fivb.org/EN/BeachVolleyball/Competitions/ContinentalCup/CAVB/viewPressRelease.asp?No=34840.
[112] Fédération International de Volleyball, "Mauritius Book Ticket to London Following CAVB Continental Cup Victory," press release, May 27, 2012, accessed September 27, 2017, http://www.fivb.org/EN/BeachVolleyball/Competitions/ContinentalCup/CAVB/viewPressRelease.asp?No=34874.

Figure 3.3 May 26, 2012 press release chronicling the women's CAVB Continental Cup. (Fivb.org)

Figure 3.4 May 24, 2012 press release chronicling the women's CAVB Continental Cup. (FIVB.org)

Figure 3.5 May 25, 2012 press release for the women's CAVB Continental Cup final. (FIVB.org)

Figure 3.6 May 27, 2012 press release announcing the winners of the women's CAVB Continental Cup. (FIVB.org)

Conclusion

Elodie's return to her birthplace failed to satisfy her nostalgic fantasy of return, both because of her own position as outsider and because her goals to represent Africa and to put Mauritius on the map reflected the global relations of power and privilege in which she was

enmeshed. If sport was a pathway to cultural citizenship in Canada, in the context of Elodie's international competition, citizenship was a pathway to global sports participation. Despite Elodie's sense of social isolation on the Mauritian indoor national team, she proved her value in athletic performance. On the national team, complex relationships among ethnicities in Mauritius played out in interpersonal exchanges. Teammates barely acknowledged Elodie as a person, addressing her through racial epithets rather than her name. Elodie's training camp in China further disrupted naturalized couplings of race, nation, and homeland. In China, she felt rejected by her hosts despite their shared ancestry, and on the Mauritian national team, Elodie's social status remained in limbo. Nonetheless, she did not protest. She had some understanding of her privilege relative to her teammates and tolerated their behavior. Most important, she viewed her experience through the grid of team as family and team above all.

Participating in the African Continental Cup for beach volleyball intensified the scrutiny of Elodie's diasporic identity because she was no longer vying to represent a country, but a continent. In pan-African competitions, Elodie felt as though her Chinese and diasporic subjectivities were elided within a broader continental narrative of black Africa. She aimed through her position in the athletic spotlight to highlight the heterogeneity of Mauritius, while resisting the homogenous narrative of the African continent. Yet in so doing, Elodie leaned on the rhetoric of "diversity" and multiculturalism dominant in Mauritius, Canada, and the Olympics despite her own experience of the failures of those models.[113] Furthermore, Elodie's ethnicity and her embrace of Western norms of the sport that was itself a Western creation positioned her as an outsider to the African competition. At times Elodie viewed the African

[113] In recent discussion (conversation with the author, February 26, 2018), Elodie said she was still working through whether she felt the language of "diversity" and multicultural rhetoric were disingenuous. She did not blindly endorse them, however. She believed through this project she is furthering her understanding around these issues.

competition through a Canadian lens, and questioned her own legitimacy as a Mauritian and continental representative. Regardless, Elodie and Natacha persevered and qualified for the Olympics through the Continental Cup.

Despite this personal achievement, Elodie headed toward the Olympics ambivalent about her role as an African ambassador of beach volleyball. Had she unfairly taken advantage of the continental trial system? Had she *deserved* to compete in London? In reality, she had few incentives to consider these questions at the time. Preparing for her Olympic debut took precedence. She had sacrificed her personal life and teaching career, and dedicated years to disciplining her body with hopes of one day competing in the Games. Elodie's reality as an elite international athlete had occupied all facets of her life, and the structure of the sport isolated her from social and political concerns. But Elodie's victory was the culmination of a life-long dream—a watershed moment that she would struggle to make sense of for years to come.

CHAPTER 4

Embodying the Games

The important thing in life is not the triumph, but the fight; the essential thing is not to have won, but to have fought well.

—Pierre de Coubertin (founder of the modern Olympic Games)[1]

Elodie laid claim to the African beach volleyball circuit largely through birthright. She also drew on her Canadian social and cultural repertoire in order to navigate the landscape of the CAVB Continental Cup and to earn a berth to the 2012 Games. Her education, Mauritian nationality, and ties to Canada advantaged Elodie in relation to her African competitors, even as she gained entry to the FIVB World Tours through a diversity initiative. Elodie and Natacha's entry through this alternative route, reserved for regions with less developed beach volleyball programs, pegged Team Mauritius as a token "guest" at best, and an undeserving participant at worst. On the World Tour and in the Olympics, Elodie vacillated between feeling victimized by structural barriers that put her at a competitive disadvantage and belittled for taking advantage of the system that aimed to address those barriers. But the history and evolution of the sport necessitated changes that made beach volleyball accessible to more of the world.

An American invention embedded in Western sporting structures such as the FIVB and the Olympics, volleyball had long been dominated by North American and European teams—Brazil excepted. The London 2012 Olympic context further underscored the historical dominance of the West in the Games. Elodie's experience as a beneficiary of inclusion projects reveals how prominent teams and nations in beach volleyball embodied the hegemonic values

[1] International Olympic Committee, *Factsheet the Olympic Movement*, April 16, 2015, (Lausanne, Switzerland: International Olympic Committee), 1, https://stillmed.olympic.org/Documents/Reference_documents_Factsheets/The_Olympic_Movement.pdf.

and structures inherent in the sport. Although new twenty-first century rules designed to encourage diverse global participation in the FIVB World Tour and Olympics provided a pathway for one country per region to gain access to "mainstream" competition, the rules also stigmatized those entrants while failing to address the basic structural conditions that limited participation in the sport.[2] Diversity efforts such as the Continental Cup recognized to some extent that sport was not an "equal playing field" or entirely meritocratic. But the mere presence of diverse athletes did not necessarily indicate progress or equality. Just as important, the sport's cultural norms and practices (bikini uniform, styles of play, culture, and jargon), as well as the FIVB's brand of inclusion, closely reflected Canada's and France's culture of sport and multiculturalism. Indeed, it was precisely the familiarity of Elodie and Natacha with Western culture that gave them some ability to "pass" in those contexts. While the FIVB and some of its players embraced both Elodie and team Mauritius as special and unique, their "inclusion" was predicated on the pair's ability to embody the right balance of foreign and familiar, as had Elodie in multicultural Canada.[3]

Elodie's history within the international beach volleyball scene reveals athletic mega events as emblematic of a larger globalized system that produces and fosters privileged transnational subjects—including those who represent less developed regions of the world. From a small nation with an underdeveloped athletic program, Elodie and Natacha struggled to secure funding for and access to training facilities, equipment, trainers, and competition expenses—limitations that put the pair at a competitive disadvantage in the FIVB world circuit. Elodie drew

[2] Top competitors have overwhelmingly been Americans, Brazilians, and Australians since 1996. A majority of participating teams have come from Europe and former European colonies with dominant white settler groups.
[3] Not all players agreed with the FIVB's universality rule to diversify the competition. Some players believed that this rule diluted the competitiveness of the FIVB World Tours. Team Mauritius experienced hostility from these kinds of players.

upon her religious community for spiritual and financial support, and leveraged her Asian settler network in Canada, Mauritius, and Europe to fulfil her lifelong dream to compete on the World Tour and in the Olympics. Once there, she experienced the limitations of a community built on the paradoxical vision of international comradery in a context of Western dominance. The embrace of transnational and multinational athletes in the FIVB and Olympics, however beneficial to individual athletes, advanced the project of a globalized but Westernized world. Indeed, the ideals of sport promoted by the Olympics were rife with paradox: a harmonious global community rooted in competitive nationalisms, cohesive national identities based on fictions of multicultural harmony, and a "meritocracy" in the interest of global marketing.

This final chapter elucidates how Elodie's berth into the Olympics through the continental cup reflected a new kind of transnational athletic entrepreneurialism. This pathway to the Olympics privileged relatively elite, mobile, and cosmopolitan subjects such as Elodie: subjects of color who had the economic and cultural capital to take advantage of diversity rules. While African competitors and officials found Elodie's flexible transnational identity and relative ethnic privilege unfair, Western organizers such as the FIVB and the Olympics celebrated Elodie as a beneficiary of their inclusion projects. Elodie herself could not have anticipated, nor did she fully understand how her experience as this special entrant reduced her to an actor in this international display of nations that celebrated globalization through capitalist consumption and what Vijay Prashad calls multicultural imperialism. In the spectacle of the 2012 London Games, Elodie was both consumed and consumer. This unique point of view shaped Elodie's own developing consciousness, raising questions about her unconscious complicity in the hierarchies inherent in international sport. Compounded by her personal conflict about how she had qualified for the Olympics, Elodie left the Games with a sense of ambivalence. Was she

deserving or underserving, opportunist or victim? Through memories of her Olympic experience, Elodie sought to make sense of her identity, not just as an Olympian but as a diasporic member of multiple communities.

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Setting the Stage

The Founding of the Olympiad and the History of the London Games

Pierre de Coubertin—the founder of the modern Olympics in 1894—and his successors envisioned sport and Olympism as a secular faith with universal appeal for international democracy.[4] The spirit of Olympism, in his view, encompassed "a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind."[5] Britain, the birthplace of modern athletics, had inspired Pierre de Coubertin to revitalize the modern Olympic Games. Inspired by Britain's late-nineteenth-century approach to sport as an educational tool, he envisioned the Olympics as a means to advance the principles of respect, friendship and fair play.[6] Coubertin admired the rugged fitness of English school boys and the way sport had developed their physical aptitude and character.[7] Sport as a moral influence on physical culture was not limited to the British. Coubertin had also visited the U.S. in 1889 and familiarized himself with U.S. notions of physical education grounded in Muscular Christianity and the popularity of intercollegiate sport. There he formed a close connection with Theodore Roosevelt

[4] Guttmann, *Olympics*, 3. Under the IOC Charter's Fundamental Principles of Olympism (2015), one of the missions of the Olympic movement is "to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity."
[5] International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter* (Lausanne, Switzerland: International Olympic Committee, 2017), 11, https://stillmed.olympic.org/Documents/olympic_charter_en.pdf.
[6] Jacque Rogge, speech at the opening ceremony, in *The Complete London 2012 Opening Ceremony | London 2012 Olympic Games*, streamed live July 27, 2012 on the Olympic Channel, YouTube video, 3:59:49, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4As0e4de-rI&t=6213s.
[7] Guttmann, *Olympics*, 9.

with whom he maintained a long friendship.[8] These concepts of modern sport gave birth to Coubertin's vision of the Olympics, designed to create a new, harmonious, and peaceful world order that he called Olympism. Coubertin's vision of Olympism also derived from Enlightenment traditions of French humanism that linked the "body, mind, and spirit in the quest for moral uplift, social betterment and international peace."[9]

London's first Olympic Games in 1908 embodied the contradictions within Coubertin's vision of modern sportsmanship as a universalizing principle. These Games remained imbued with Eurocentric and androcentric notions of the universal human—a foundation of Coubertin's Olympism. The 1908 Olympics took place against the backdrop of the British women's suffrage movement, but Coubertin's concept of liberal individualism excluded women. Although he envisioned women as spectators in a sports festival for men, women nonetheless participated in archery, figure skating, and tennis—events generally regarded as less strenuous and modest enough for females.[10] After the closing ceremony, police had to control a women's revolt in which rioters waved signs that read, "votes for women."[11] Furthermore, neither the philosophy of humanism or universalism directly challenged European colonialism. While Coubertin believed that the Olympics would advance the values of international comradery and notions of universal humanism, paradoxically, these very ideals—like those of beach volleyball—were embedded in histories of colonialism and European dominance. The 1948 Games that occurred in London in

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[8] Guttmann, *Olympics*, 10.
[9] Ben Carrington, "Cosmopolitan Olympism, Humanism and the Spectacle of 'Race,'" in *Post-Olympism?: Questioning Sport in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. John Bale and Mette Krogh Christensen (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 82.
[10] Guttmann, *Olympics,* 4; and Janie Hampton, *London Olympics 1908 and 1948* (London, UK: Shire Publications, 2011), 12.
[11] Hampton, 17; Women made up ten percent of the competitors across nine events at these Games, but only in events considered less "strenuous" and confusing for internal organs. Hampton, 33. The 1948 Games also introduced sex testing after two of the women at the 1946 European championship proved to be men. The test involved doctors looking into the underwear of female competitors for "sexual abnormalities."

the wake of World War II reflected the political schisms and aggressive nationalisms of the era. After the 1936 Nazi-dominated Games in Berlin, London sought to restore the ideals of equality and fair play absent the overt racial propaganda of the Nazi era.[12] Germany and Japan were banned from participation, while the Soviets joined the games as an ideal pathway to demonstrate the supremacy of communism in a capitalist world.[13]

The London 2012 Games, by contrast, grappled with the paradox of an event organized around national loyalties in a world with increasingly transnational subjects and flexible notions of citizenship. According Ben Carrington, noted British sociologist on race and culture in sport, the Olympics always embodied elements of modern cosmopolitanism:

> Cosmopolitan Olympism challenges the saliency of national teams, emblems and allegiances. It decenters nationalism and nation-state symbolism and promotes the sense of human achievement; it avoids a spurious amoral universalism and embraces a contested and explicitly political sporting democracy; it engages and extends sport's human rights discourse and the basis upon which those rights are formed thus politicizing the IOC's own statements; it questions the focus on the elite and the body beautiful at the expense of the participatory while centering the importance of the para-Olympics.[14]

For historian Allen Guttmann, by contrast, Coubertin's vision of internationalism was never truly cosmopolitan.[15] Although the Olympic Charter defined the Games as a competition between individuals,[16] the IOC fashioned the Games based on national representation. No athlete was permitted to compete as an individual rather than a representative of a nation-state, and each country's national Olympic committee selected its own representatives.

The strong current of ethno-nationalism and populist discourse that infused British politics at the time of the 2012 London games highlighted the paradox of an Olympic

[12] Hampton, 19.
[13] Hampton, 21.
[14] Carrington, "Cosmopolitan Olympism," 93.
[15] Guttmann, *Olympics,* 2.
[16] Guttmann, 2.

cosmopolitan vision rooted in competitive nationalisms. Populism in London, as in the U.S., highlighted the racial undercurrents of "us" versus "them" mentalities rooted in national and ideological borders. As Britain opened its doors to the world for the London games, it juxtaposed to this populist backlash a cosmopolitan ideal whereby diverse peoples from different nations would unite through the consumption of popular culture, music, food, and a "diverse" Team Great Britain.[17] For instance, Jessica Ennis (whose mother is English and father is of Jamaican descent) and Mo Farah (who was born in Somalia and is a naturalized Briton) appeared prominently in the British media, primarily for the anticipation of their successful athletic performance, but also for their ancestry.

Roughly eleven percent of Great Britain's 2012 Olympians were foreign born. Yet they also faced greater scrutiny than did British-born athletes about their nationality and loyalties.[18] The media pejoratively labelled diasporic athletes, particularly those born outside of the country, as "plastic Brits." Headlines blared, "Team GB: 'Plastic Brits' where do they come from?" (*Telegraph*),[19] "Who or what are 'plastic Brits'" (*BBC*),[20] "Team GB has 61 'plastic Brits' taking part in London Olympics,"[21] and "'Plastic Brits?' Were they the secret of our success?'" (*Independent*).[22] According to the *Independent*, "immigration had a part to play in at least 24 of the 65 medals claimed by Team GB in its most successful Games for more than a century." Even celebratory articles used the derogatory term "plastic Brits," reproducing a hierarchy of national belonging based on immigrant status. Such articles celebrated difference while subtly striking a

[17] Carrington refers to uniting through food, popular culture, and music as *banal cosmopolitanism.* Carrington, "Cosmopolitan Olympism," 93.
[18] Blenkinsop and Kinross, "Team BG."
[19] Blenkinsop and Kinross, "Team BG."
[20] "Who or What Are 'Plastic Brits'?," *BBC Sport*, July 5, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/sport/athletics/33401456.
[21] "Team GB Has 61 'Plastic Brits' Taking Part in London Olympics," *Daily Mail* (UK), July 11, 2011, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/olympics/article-2171923/London-2012-Games-Team-GB-61-plastic-Brits.html.
[22] Nigel Morris, "Plastic Brits? They Were the Secret of Our Success," *Independent* (UK), August 14, 2012, http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/news/plastic-brits-they-were-the-secret-of-our-success-8038764.html.

cautionary note. How deep, they seemed to suggest, did these athletes' loyalties to Britain actually run? While the discourse around "plastic Brits" was localized, the language of diversity was mobile, and the institutionalization of diversity was transnational.[23] London—host city, founding nation of modern athletics, and former imperial power—set a tone that embodied the contradictions within the "nationalist internationalism" and cosmopolitanism of the Olympics.

Opening Ceremony

The symbolism of opening ceremonies at the Olympic Games typically fluctuates uneasily between nationalist displays and internationalist ideals. The opening ceremony of the 2012 London Games was no exception. Britain, which had twice hosted the Olympics in the twentieth century, orchestrated the 2012 opening ceremony as a grand homecoming of the Games to a veteran stage. In line with Coubertin's original vision, opening ceremonies incorporated symbolic gestures that conveyed the spirit of Olympism. Olympic rings represented the interconnection of the five continents, the torch relay symbolized the connection between the Olympic origins and host country, and the Olympic oath affirmed peaceful internationalism.[24]

Yet the 2012 opening ceremony also displayed and disseminated hegemonic national narratives within a British-dominated ceremonial spectacle.[25] The performance of the country's history, staged and broadcast to 900 million spectators, opened with the advent of "modernity" during the industrial revolution.[26] In the stadium, the "stage" transformed into several tall industrial smoke stacks and factories with several soot-covered men "working" to the rhythm of

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[23] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 16.
[24] Guttmann, *Olympics*, 2.
[25] Anika Oettler, "The London 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony and Its Polyphonous Aftermath," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 39, no. 3 (July 2014): 247, https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723514541281.
[26] April Ormsby, "London 2012 Opening Ceremony Draws 900 Million Viewers," *Reuters* (UK), August 7, 2012, https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-oly-ratings-day11/london-2012-opening-ceremony-draws-900-million-viewers-idUKBRE8760V820120807. *Sponsorship Intelligence* estimated broadcast to 220 territories, 506 broadcast channels. "London 2012 Olympic Games Global Broadcast Report," *Sponsorship Intelligence,* December 2012.

the music.[27] Soon a group of suffragettes appeared with replica picket signs from the late 1800s. Elsewhere on the stage, a group of well-dressed black men carrying suitcases emerged, representing the wave of foreigners from the West Indies to Britain in the late nineteenth century. BBC broadcast commentators mediated and interpreted each scene, narrating the hardships of the industrial revolution, the struggles of the suffragettes, and the rapidly shifting racial and cultural landscape. Although the cast was multiracial, absent from this historical narrative was any discussion of British slavery or colonialism.[28] The performance thus reconstructed an idealized British past that united classes, sexes, and races through a collective narrative of triumph over hardship. Director Danny Boyle's narrative of the twentieth century also arched toward social progress, expunging the contentious history of decolonialization, as the ceremony celebrated the nation's heroic reconstruction after the devastation of the Second World War.[29]

The last third of the performance focused on British popular culture from the 1960s to the present. In a celebration of post-racial society, a multiethnic ensemble and a teenaged interracial couple on a date literally danced the audience through the decades against a backdrop of song and images.[30] Emili Sandé—a recognized Scottish singer with Zambian ancestry—embraced the audience with Mahatma Gandhi's favorite hymn "Abide With Me." This segment of the ceremony closed with fifty multiethnic dancers surrounding a boy and Akram Khan: a famed

[27] This was one of the main sections of the performance. It was called "Pandemonium" and ran for about fifteen minutes.
[28] In contrast, the Rio 2016 opening ceremony prominently featured colonialism and the country's rootedness in slavery. This narrative, too, is not without critique.
[29] Danny Boyle is also the director of *Slumdog Millionaire*. His rendition of British history divorced itself from the world, except for victims of war. Waves of hospital beds filled with children and the wounded appeared on stage. The National Health Service and hospitals figured prominently in the narrative in order to highlight the country's history of dedication to social services. The children on the beds served as a launch point to celebrate children's British literature such as Peter Pan.
[30] Oettler, "Polyphonous Aftermath," 249.

English modern-dance performer and choreographer with Bangladeshi heritage.[31] The performance thus constructed Britain as a thriving multiethnic society, predicated upon an erasure of its violent colonial history.

Parade of Nations

Elodie herself witnessed none of the opening performances, nor did she view them on television. Instead, she marched in a procession to the stadium with the Mauritian delegation, making history in her own right. The Mauritian Olympic Committee (MOC) had outfitted her with a contemporary white blazer and matching pencil skirt, both of which fit too snuggly for comfort. Elodie, like other female Mauritian delegates, adorned her outfit with a red neck scarf and black flats. In full regalia, Elodie and Natacha strode to the stadium from their Olympic village dorm—a two-kilometer walk. Fans lined the outside perimeter fence of the village and hollered for pictures, autographs and high-fives. Elodie reveled in the excitement, recalling memories of how the Olympics had inspired her as a child. She felt like a hero to the kids who had stayed up past their bedtime to attend this historic event. Elodie was but a single actor in the one-and-a-half-hour parade of nations, but her presence, like that of other multinational, diasporic athletes, was essential to Britain's iteration of Olympism.[32] The procession's emblematic celebration of internationalism stood in stark contrast to Britain's historic exclusion of many nations from its colonial past. Former colonies and protectorates now marched behind their own national flags.[33] It would not have occurred to Elodie at the time that the parade of nations mirrored the reach of the former British empire.

[31] Oettler, "Polyphonous Aftermath," 250.
[32] Oettler, "Polyphonous Aftermath," 245.
[33] Oettler, "Polyphonous Aftermath," 245.

Once the procession of nations and their delegates began to fill the stadium, television coverage shifted to individual countries. One study of the NBC coverage of these Games found that it gave significantly less airtime to most African and southeast Asian nations than to Western nations. Island nations hardly registered.[34] This skewed pattern of coverage seemed to parallel my own viewing of BBC's televising of the ceremony. For instance, BBC commentators failed to recognize Natacha, who carried the Mauritian flag, as they did for the flag bearers of other larger countries. Elodie did not view the television coverage of the ceremony, but family and friends complained about the scant coverage of Mauritius in their local broadcast.[35] Although the BBC announcers briefly mentioned the participation of Mauritius in eight previous Games, the screen time given to the Mauritian delegation was only fifteen seconds. Not surprisingly, Britain's history of colonization in Mauritius and its on-going conflict with its former colony over the Chagos archipelago remained hidden from view.[36] Television commentators produced a narrative about the relative competitiveness of each nation, conflated with social progress and modernity. For instance, when the delegation of Burkina Faso entered the stadium, one commenter remarked, "There are lots of small teams of one would expect. As we said earlier, some will come for the experience only."[37] Such commentary highlighted the prowess of so-called modernized countries like Britain and the United States, distinguishing "real" competitors from token "guests."

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[34] Andre Shears and Emily Fekete, "Re-constructing the Map: NBC's Geographic Imagination and the Opening Ceremony for the 2012 London Olympics," *Sociological Research Online* 19, no. 1 (March 2014): 7, https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3249.

[35] At my request, Elodie finally brought herself to watch the opening ceremony in 2016. She said earlier she could not bring herself to watch the ceremony or had little desire to view it. She had only heard from friends and family that their broadcasters barely covered Mauritius.

[36] Chagos Refugees Group, *Returning Home: A Proposal for the Resettlement of the Chagos Islands*, (London: UK Chagos Support Association, 2008), booklet. Just prior to announcing Mauritius, commentators discussed Mauritania's independence from France.

[37] Throughout the procession of athletes, BBC commentators remarked several times on how the participation of certain countries were, in themselves, victories.

To conclude the opening ceremony, president of the IOC Jacques Rogge addressed the audience, celebrating the London Games as the birthplace of modern sport and London itself as a bastion of multicultural cosmopolitanism. "Thank you, London, for inviting the world to this diverse, vibrant, cosmopolitan city, yet again." He predicted that "the values that inspired de Coubertin" would "come to life over the next seventeen days as the world's best athletes" competed "in the spirit of friendship, respect, and fair play."[38] The 2012 Games were to honor the legacies of the two previous London Olympics while crafting a new multicultural modernity. Elodie hardly remembered this speech let alone its details. She was among a swarm of other athletes taking pictures with one another. With the excitement in the stadium, she did not think many athletes adequately heard or paid attention to the speeches. Thus, began Elodie's Olympic debut.

Diversity, Universality, Inclusion

Even before stepping onto the sandy courts of the Horse Guards Parade, the odds were against Elodie and Natacha taking even one set from their competitors. Placed in Pool A, Team Mauritius faced the current number one contender, Brazil, as well as the Czech Republic and Germany, each of which qualified in the world ranking among the top sixteen. Elodie remembered little of her first two matches, first against Brazil, then against Czech Republic: "[Laugh.] They were both a blur…I was very nervous…It was the biggest crowd we've ever played in front of."[39] During her first game, Elodie's feet were still recovering from the blisters caused by the walk the previous night during the opening ceremony in ill-fitting shoes. In hindsight, Elodie wondered whether she had done everything possible, mentally and physically,

[38] Rogge, speech.
[39] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, November 17, 2017.

to prepare for her Olympic debut.[40] Yet she had known from the outset that Team Mauritius was out of its league.

As obscure as Elodie thought Mauritius was to rest of the world, many spectators at the Horse Guards Parade had heard of the African island nation, although primarily as a tropical tourist destination for Europeans. One BBC headline about the pair read: "Why Mauritius' beach volleyball team doesn't use its beaches."[41] Elodie and Natacha were also featured smiling during a practice wearing their bikinis on the front cover of the widely circulated London Evening Standard. The caption read: "Bikini weather: the Mauritius beach volleyball team enjoys the sunshine during a practice session in Horse Guards Parade today."[42] The exotic reputation of Team Mauritius preceded their arrival and seamlessly integrated the pair into the event's "beachy" culture. Mauritian officials appreciated the conflation of Mauritian beach tourism and the island nation's first Olympic beach volleyball team. "It was good publicity," said Joseph Hip Sing, a former member of the MOC.[43] When Elodie and Natacha competed, the local crowd cheered enthusiastically. I suspected that their underdog status combined with the country's exotic reputation appealed to London spectators.[44] But did spectators or competitors take the pair seriously as Olympians? Despite enjoying some of their time at the Games, I wondered, had their

[40] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 17, 2017. Elodie said she and Natacha talked about whether to attend the Opening Ceremony and the risks involved in that. As the flag bearer, Natacha could not deny the opportunity; Elodie wanted to support her beach partner. Neither wanted to miss this once in a lifetime opportunity to participate in the event.
[41] Yasine Mohabuth, "Why Mauritius' Beach Volleyball Team Doesn't Use Its Beaches," *BBC Sport*, July 16, 2012, http://www.bbc.com/sport/olympics/18552793.
[42] Front page photo caption reads: "Bikini Weather: The Mauritius Beach Volleyball Team Enjoys the Sunshine During a Practice Session in Horse Guards Parade Today," *London Evening Standard* (UK), July 23, 2012.
[43] Hip Sing, conversation.
[44] The cheers and vocalized support are what I observed attending each of Team Mauritius' live matches in London.

qualification through the Continental Cup—a diversity initiative—bar the pair from the status of "real" Olympic athletes?[45]

Figure 4.1 Natacha Rigobert and Elodie Li Yuk Lo on front page of the *London Evening Standard*, 2012. (British Library)

Diversity in the FIVB and Olympics

Elodie and Natacha's particular predicament was, in part, a product of the evolution of beach volleyball itself. Unlike its indoor cousin, beach volleyball's association with the beach,

[45] As Sara Ahmed argues, there's a paradox in the institutionalization of diversity—despite its importance—since it often ends up obscuring racism and institutional whiteness within those very organizations. Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 14, 111.

sun, modern music, and unique "California lifestyle" developed in the 1950s and 1960s.[46] Over the next decades, the sport gained popularity across the U.S., Brazil, Europe, parts of Asia, and Australia. United States-sponsored tours proliferated and the FIVB sanctioned Brazil to host the first international competition.[47] The sport gained popularity first among Americans and Brazilians, and then among Europeans and Australians, while the promotion of "beach" cultures in these regions helped to enhance participation and sharpen their competitive edge. By the time of beach volleyball's 1996 Olympic debut at the Atlanta Games, it had evolved into a hyper-competitive international sport dominated—with the exception of Brazilian teams—by white North Americans, Europeans, and Australians of European descent.[48] At the 1996 Olympics, the gold medals across all sports were overwhelmingly American, Russian, and European, raising questions about cultural imperialism.[49] As the years passed, Europeans and North Americans continued to claim three-fourths of Olympic medals, while athletes—particularly female athletes—from Asia, Latin America, and Africa continued to play auxiliary roles on the Olympic stage.[50]

During these same years, discourses of multiculturalism proliferated in the Western world. Starting in the 1990s, Olympism centered sports as the vehicle through which exceptional athletes could transcend the bounds of racism. A celebration of difference through the production

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[46] "History," Fédération International de Volleyball, accessed January 23, 2018, http://www.fivb.org/EN/Beachvolleyball/History.asp.

[47] The first two-man beach volleyball game was reportedly played in Santa Monica, California in the 1940s with rumors that families in Hawai'i were playing six-on-six beach volleyball as early as the 1920s. During the 1930s, beach volleyball was largely a leisure sport for those looking for relief from the Depression.

[48] A few Asian teams also participated. Notably Japan and Indonesia.

[49] Guttmann, *Olympics,* 193. African nations collectively earned the least number of medals compared to the other continental regions.

[50] Guttmann, 194. Since the game's inception in the Olympics in 1996 the U.S. has won six gold medals, two silver medals, and two bronze medals. Brazil has won three gold, seven silver, and three bronze medals. A combined count of European countries includes two gold, two silver, and three bronze medals. Australia has won one gold and one bronze medal. Canada has won one bronze medal. China has won one silver and one bronze medal. This tally by country combines both the women's and men's events.

of personal "ethnic" narratives supplanted histories of oppression in the promotional literature of the FIVB and the IOC—organizations that claimed to have long championed diversity and international comradery.[51] As postcolonial and critical race scholars have argued, the institutional and governmental embrace of multiculturalism served as a technology for managing difference.[52]

Multiculturalism was not only a matter of rhetoric; it also found expression in a new diversity pathway into international sport. Voices within the IOC itself recognized the need for change. Maurice Herzog in the 1977 wrote: "the level of sports performance at the Olympic Games is practically inaccessible to the athletes of many new or developing countries which, unless their participation is purely symbolic, would tend to feel uninvolved by the Olympic movement."[53] Only in the twenty-first century, during Elodie's process of qualification for the 2012 Games, did the FIVB and IOC create an official pathway to ensure that a representative from each of the Olympics' five major regions would compete in the sport via the Continental Cup tournaments. This initiative aimed to address issues of access for countries and regions with less developed beach volleyball programs and to stimulate competition within those regions.[54] The vast majority of African nations did not compete in the mainstream FIVB circuit, which prior to the 2012 Games was a prerequisite for Olympic qualification.[55] The advent of the

[51] Prashad, *Myth of Cultural Purity*, 63.
[52] Fujikane and Okamura, *Asian Settler Colonialism*; Gonzalez, "Remembering Pearl Harbor"; Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants*; Prashad, *Myth of Cultural Purity*; and Rattansi, *Multiculturalism*.
[53] Herzog, report. Guttmann argues that to realize Coubertin's dreams, the Olympic program needs to equalize the number of events for men and women and include sports of non-Western origin in which nations from the global south have some natural or cultural advantage. However, regardless of the origin of the sport, the IOC conceptualizes them in specifically Western terms. He gives the instances of judo. Guttmann, *Olympics*, 194.
[54] See chapter 3 on the Continental Cup format and goals.
[55] Prior to the 2012 Olympics, entrants to the Games mirrored a format similar to qualifications for the 1996 Atlanta Games whereby the FIVB selected the top teams and players based on world rankings for the 1995-1996 season. For some of the Olympics slots, the FIVB prioritized Continental Champions if the champions of those countries had not already filled the maximum number of teams a country could send. For the 1996 Games, the FIVB selected the top two highest-ranked teams from the top eight (men's) and top four (women's) countries, as well as the top two teams

Continental Cup changed that requirement.[56] However, for Elodie and Natacha the pair would have likely qualified for the Olympics even with the old format for diversity entrants, since they were the only African team to participate in the FIVB circuit that 2011-2012 season.[57]

The diversity rules varied across Elodie's FIVB international competitions, but in every case, her experience underscored her discomfort with inclusion predicated on Otherness. Since the other continental regions already had produced "bona fide" teams on the basis of merit, in FIVB competitions only African countries—in this case Elodie and Natacha—needed to qualify through the universality rule. For the Olympics, the champion of the Continental Cup for each region would then qualify. Nations that did not make the cut in the first round, based on their position in the top sixteen world-rankings, could still qualify through the alternate route of the Continental Cup, provided that two teams from that country were not already in the top sixteen spots. While countries such as Canada also qualified for the 2012 Olympics through the Continental Cup, they had not endured two seasons of scrutiny as had FIVB's diversity beneficiaries.

The promotion of diversity within international beach volleyball competitions in no way erased the workings of privilege, particularly in sports such as track and field, swimming, and beach volleyball.[58] Even as the new diversity rules permitted a wide range of entrants to international sport competition, they perpetuated what Vijay Prashad calls multicultural

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from the organizing country. The national federation of those countries could also hold additional qualifying tournaments to give a second chance to non-qualifying teams. Fédération International de Volleyball, *Olympic Beach Volleyball Teams' Information and Media Guide* (Lausanne: Fédération International de Volleyball, 1996), 123.

[56] Prior to the 2012 Games, South Africa had been the only team to participate regularly in the FIVB world circuit and to have participated in the Olympics twice.

[57] Elodie mentioned how the newer Continental Cup rules had made it harder for the pair to qualify since they needed to compete through Africa. The competition was not necessarily more difficult; rather the labor of playing additional tournaments, its related expenses, issues with identity politics, and the unpredictability of the playing conditions proved challenging (see chapter 3).

[58] Carrington, "Cosmopolitan Olympism," 90.

imperialism—a form of diversity management while empowering the white majority and superficially retaining differences that facilitate consumerism.[59] Elodie's experience of qualifying through diversity efforts reveals how African competitors were inherently positioned as outsiders or token "guests" to the sport. In an interview a year after the 2012 Games, Elodie reflected on the personal impact these rules had on her sense of athletic accomplishment:

> You didn't qualify to be there the same way as other countries…hearing comments from other countries and other teams [about the universality rule] took away from the experience…A lot of people were saying it watered down the competition and it should be the top twenty-four teams with the world ranking.[60]

As diversity entrants, the pair struggled to transcend the perception that as African participants, they diluted the competition.

The IOC and media employed the language of universalism even as it framed non-Western athletes in demeaning ways.[61] Carrington exemplifies this point in his discussion of Eric Moussambani or "Eric" from Equatorial Guinea in the 2000 Sydney Games who stood out as a celebrated failure.[62] The media and sportscasters praised Eric for embodying the Olympic spirit, but the embrace of this minor and likable figure occurred within a patronizing subtext that (re)framed the West's understanding of the African Other.[63] Unlike Eric, who had just learned to swim a year prior to his Olympic appearance, Elodie and Natacha had been playing competitive volleyball since their youth. Yet beach volleyball's Euro-American roots and Western-normative aesthetic standards rendered Elodie and non-white African players in the FIVB as "unnatural"

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[59] Prashad, *Myth of Cultural Purity*, 61.
[60] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, December 27, 2013.
[61] Carrington, "Cosmopolitan Olympism," 88.
[62] Carrington, 88.
[63] Carrington, 90. Carrington argues that European athletes have the benefit of being regarded as unique individuals with diverse narratives about the people from their nations. In other words, they do not endure what Adichie calls a singular story of condescension and pity.

participants.[64] Elodie's former coach Kristine Drakich competed on Canada's national team in the mid-1990s, and observed the increasing predominance of male coaches and the constrained physical aesthetic for female players in subsequent decades:

> [W]hen it became an Olympic sport, I was already thirty…The body types were way different…[Now] they're younger, there's lots of male coaches constantly around. With the onset of Youth World Championships and the Junior World Championships around the 2000s, it changed what the body type looked like…[Back then] we didn't have coaches. And if we did, some of them were women, a lot of women coached…The women that were on the world tour were well into their 30s by that time. Natalie Cook was maybe twenty-one at that time, she won a bronze. But Kerri Pottharst was thirty-one, Jackie Silva was thirty-five. All the medalists were much older, so everybody was much older.[65]

For women in the sport, the gendered and hypersexualized expectation of the bikini uniform, normalized the youth, beauty and whiteness of beach volleyball. The YouTube comments of the match between Germany and Mauritius exemplify this point. An overwhelming number of comments related to the sexual appeal of the uniform, characterizing the "blue team" (Germany) as "hot," more skilled, and better dressed, and the "yellow team" (Mauritius) as "old," short, and amateurish.[66] Furthermore, within one conversational thread, commentators mistook Mauritius for Mauritania, debating whether it was a "real country." Such comments denigrated Team Mauritius as a competitor.

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[64] John Bale's work on imaginative sports geographies examines the representation of sport and body culture in colonial discourse, and those who contribute to this discourse such as photographers and authors. While his work focuses on how early and mid-nineteenth-century Europeans imagined the "natural" athleticism of the African body through visual and imaginary interpretations of the Rwandan activity *gusimbuka-urukiramende* (high jump), it contributes to my understanding of beach volleyball aesthetics as a specific constructed aesthetic. John Bale, *Imagined Olympians: Body Culture and Colonial Representation in Rwanda* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 32.

[65] Drakich, conversation.

[66] *Women's Beach Volleyball Pool A – GER v MRI | London 2012 Olympics*, posted August 1, 2012 by the Olympic Channel, YouTube video, 34:09, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWuLiCKoIW8.

International Comradery

Elodie's Olympic experience was deeply shadowed by her experience of an outsider—even as a participant—in the Olympic competitions. After 2013—when I first interviewed Elodie about her Olympic experience—her reflections grew increasingly ambivalent. Often, what made her feel special—for instance, her role as representative of Mauritius and Africa—inflamed her feelings of not belonging. Most often, these internal conflicts emerged from Elodie's interactions with her global athletic community.

As Elodie remembered her years as an international athlete, she most enjoyed the social scene away from the beach courts. Specifically, the Olympic Athletes' Village exemplified her childhood vision of the Games:

> Elodie: It was cool, most of the time we'd go in the cafeteria and meet new people and say "hi," and even in the rec room, we'd say "hi." It was exciting to meet some of the more famous athletes.
>
> Yuka: Like who?
>
> Elodie: Like the Williams sisters, Venus and Serena. It was actually fun 'cause they ran up to us asking us for our pins 'cause they liked collecting pins. Each country gets Olympic pins that they get to hand out.[67]

These token exchanges with athletes (famous or otherwise) were consistently the highlight of Elodie's experiences on tour.[68] As she related on multiple occasions, "I love meeting people from other countries…and learning more about the country and culture."[69] As much as Elodie enjoyed meeting new people and learning about their cultures, she also enjoyed sharing her own. In London and the World Tour, Elodie often embraced her differences. Hailing from an African

[67] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, November 23, 2017.
[68] Each National Olympic Committee has a pin they distribute to players to trade or give away to fans and competitors. Much like the Olympic stamps, these pins are collectors' items and keepsakes. It is also common for athletes to exchange jerseys as a symbolic of appreciation for their other player and/or their country.
[69] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2013.

island nation, while speaking un-accented "American" English and looking Chinese, made her feel unique:

> Elodie: In many ways it's tied to identity in terms of wanting people to know where I'm from and where I was born. It goes back to the piece of putting Mauritius on the map because every time people ask me where I'm from people are like, "where's is that?" My generic answer is, "It's off the east coast of Madagascar."…I also like to challenge their views and be like, "yup I'm African" and then that'll usually prompt them to be like, "where in Africa?"
>
> Yuka: Are these other competitors?
>
> Elodie: Just people in general, but you know to this day people ask me where I'm from. Usually my answer is first Africa. They'd ask that over the years, and so part of why I answer by telling them that I'm African first is to dispel all those notions that people generally have and assume that I should be from Asia.
>
> Yuka: So, part of the reason why when people ask you where you're from, you start with Africa, is to challenge them?
>
> El: Yup.[70]

In her interpersonal interactions with fans, locals, or other athletes, Elodie thus fulfilled one of her goals as an international athlete: to put Mauritius "on the map." Admittedly, she enjoyed challenging people's assumptions. For instance, when asked "where are you from?" her first response was "Africa." Her insistence on challenging people's assumptions through claiming genealogical ties to Africa, rather than China or Asia, reflected her desire to redress public ignorance of Africa's racial and ethnic heterogeneity. It also highlights the pervasiveness of ethnonationalism in international sports as well as the complex maneuvering of Elodie's exchanges due to her unique diasporic identity. Furthermore, those who hail from non-African countries would likely reply to such a question with a specific country rather than continental region. For instance, a Chinese national would respond "China" rather than "Asia." For Elodie, responding in this way solicited further discussion that opened opportunity for her to "educate"

[70] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 23, 2017.

people about the diversity of Africa and Mauritius. Yet these interactions rarely went beyond "generic" discussions. At the time, Elodie was less comfortable with articulating her more difficult experiences as a binational, multicultural, and relatively privileged diasporic athlete. The Games promoted a discourse of uncomplicated global harmony that encouraged these kinds of superficial interactions. Elodie was not inclined to disrupt the status quo.

Figure 4.2 Elodie Li Yuk Lo in athlete's village rec room, mingling with other Olympians. (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Figure 4.3 Cafeteria for athletes in the athlete's village. (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Even as she mingled with the world's top athlete-ambassadors, Elodie felt dismissed at the Games by her beach volleyball peers, some of whom did not see Elodie as a peer at all. In one instance, although Elodie was unaware at the time, one female beach volleyball player from Brazil asked to take a picture with Elodie as a joke:

> [T]he Brazilian team wanted to take a picture with me, and was like, "You remind me of my sister, I want to take a picture with you." I remember Natacha getting really upset because she was like, "No they don't want to take a picture of you because you look like her sister, they're just making fun of us." I was like, "whoa."…I always give people the benefit of the doubt, sometimes to my detriment so it made me feel upset when she told me that. Essentially, it's a form of bullying, right?[71]

Elodie sensed a distinct hierarchy among the players and the countries they represented early on in FIVB events. Elodie knew that Team Mauritius stood at the bottom of that ladder. No one on tour had explicitly said to Elodie or Natacha "you don't belong," but Elodie felt that she was taking up "unearned" space—burdening others with her presence. While her social interactions with athletes off the court were mostly positive, on the court she sensed hostility:

> Elodie: The first tournament we were at, it just felt like there're so many teams on the warm up court because you had to share few courts amongst a bunch of teams who were warming up for their games. Balls were coming at you in different directions and people were trying to assert their space on the court. The people that were more known on tour had their entourage. They would have more of a presence on the court.
>
> Yuka: So, like trainers, coaches, and assistants?
>
> Elodie: Yeah. Or if they travelled with two teams, they'd just take over the court because they would just practice and warm up with each other…some tournaments you have to share courts anyways. Like there weren't enough practice slots so you'd put your name down for a slot and whoever else you'd practice with. I think the sense that I got was, I don't know, I felt not necessarily wanted all the time, like we were a pity case.[72]

[71] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 23, 2017.
[72] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 23, 2017.

During each of the FIVB's World Tours, Grand Slams, and Open tournaments that Elodie attended, she was accompanied only by her partner, Natacha.[73] Even after earning modest recognition from the Mauritian volleyball and Olympic federations for their All African Games victory, the pair did not receive resources for trainers or coaches. Elodie and Natacha's bare bones presence at these world tournaments reinforced to competitors their country's lack of resources, which some may have conflated with a lack of seriousness.

For Elodie today, memories of tournament warm ups and sessions at practice courts ignite an acute sense of embarrassment, at times amounting to anguish. An important aspect of preparation for competition involved finding teams to warm up with or scrimmage against:

> Elodie: That was always hard for me because you have to go up to coaches and players and present yourself and be like, "Hey, can we share a court, can we practice with you?" just so we can practice. We didn't have a coach to do that for us. Most teams had coaches to advocate for them or try to set up these things and find us practices.
>
> Yuka: And this was at the tournament?
>
> Elodie: Yeah, usually you get there a couple days before to get acquainted with the court. That was one of the hardest things to do. It just felt like we were asking for help all the time. The other hard part was during warm up for these games. Most teams had coaches to warm them up. [It was hard] figuring out how to warm up, just the two of us.
> …
> Yuka: Did you ever feel self-conscious about it?
>
> Elodie: Oh, yeah. For sure. It was such an awkward conversation to approach someone and be like, "Oh, hey, can you help us?" I just felt like I was bothering them all the time. In many cases, [Natacha and I] would rock-paper-scissor with each other like, "Okay who's gonna ask this time?"[74]

Having to ask for help compounded Elodie's awareness that others viewed diversity entrants as ill-equipped for this level of competition. Everywhere, the pair was forced to navigate the minefield of hierarchies within international beach volleyball as it determined which teams it

[73] The other Mauritian team could not afford these competitions. Their presence was not required either, unlike for the Continental Cup.
[74] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 23, 2017.

could "safely" ask for help. The players who were good enough to enter the main draw generally trained with one other. Who you trained with was also "a measure of how good" you were.[75] Elodie's status as an African diversity entrant gave her virtually no peers. On a handful of occasions, she was able to ask two former University of Toronto alumni for help. Josh Binstock and Heather Bansley both toured the FIVB world competition and qualified for the 2012 Olympics through the North American Continental Cup.[76] At Elodie's request, the men's team from Angola and men's team from South Africa helped team Mauritius warm up in a couple of tournaments.[77]

When I asked Elodie if teams had ever directly rejected her requests for help or scrimmages, she responded, "Yeah. But I don't remember who specifically." She vaguely remembered them as teams that had coaches or another team traveling with them. It was not uncommon for teams to travel without their coaches; the costs were prohibitive. But more competitive teams had funding to bring their coaches, support staff, and additional national teams, or had enough status to recruit scrimmages easily—sometimes all four.[78] Team Mauritius enjoyed none of these advantages. Elodie and Natacha learned to approach teams such as Latvia that often did not travel with their coaches.[79] As Elodie explained, early in the competition, teams were more agreeable because they were not yet "ramping up to the tournament." As the

[75] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 23, 2017.
[76] NORCECA volleyball confederation (which includes North America, Central America, and the Caribbean). Josh and Elodie had attended the same program at their alma mater and played for the university's varsity most of the same years. Heather played for the university in Elodie's fourth year of eligibility. Both Josh and Heather also competed in 2016. Heather and her partner finished top eight at Rio.
[77] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 23, 2017.
[78] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 23, 2017. This is what Elodie observed on tour.
[79] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 23, 2017.

tournament neared, they wanted "more competition," and it became harder to ask for help.[80] At the Olympics, the pinnacle of athletic competition, virtually no teams solicited help.

Even with Elodie and Natacha's familiarity with Western styles of play and dress, Team Mauritius could not easily shed their markers of Otherness on the World Tour or at the Olympics. Significantly, Elodie did not express resentment toward the way other players treated her; rather, she empathized with what she assumed was *their* resentment of her undeserved participation—an Olympic "hand out":

> It's good to have these rules in place [to have] every representative from every continent but shouldn't there be a certain performance standard in order to be there? You know we've talked about this before, [it's] like a hand out. So, I'm still struggling with that, like the only reason that I was there was because they pitied [us], or they had this rule. Did I actually deserve or earn that spot in terms of our performance?...I think that's why I felt like we were from an African nation, because we weren't at the same standard as everyone else that was playing there. [L]ike "okay yeah, it's because you represent Africa, we had to give you a berth. You're representing an African continent."[81]

Here Elodie suggested the need for a "performance standard," and characterized her own berth to the Olympics as a "handout." Yet had such a "performance standard" existed, it would have not only eliminated her from world competitions, but also placed the Olympics even further out of reach for African competitors. Although FIVB tours were not necessary to qualify for the Olympics, they played a crucial role in its skill development for Team Mauritius, and thus for the pair's preparation for the Games. The universality rule granted that access. Elodie's comments highlighted the paradox inherent in diversity rules that granted access, based on geopolitical inequalities, to a region that would benefit from FIVB exposure. Elodie and her partner accepted the "handout," as Elodie put it, but paid for it in the form of social ostracism from their athletic community.

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[80] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 23, 2017.
[81] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.

Athlete First

On a more introspective level, participating as a diversity entrant produced feelings of both gratitude and resentment for Elodie. When I first started recording her reflections at the Olympics in 2013, Elodie more readily spoke about the validity of the diversity rules. There was less cynicism in her response about her unique pathway to qualification:

> Yuka: Why do you think the "universality" rule is in place?
>
> Elodie: For the name that it is, because the Olympics is something that is supposed to be inclusive and provide opportunity to play sport everywhere. They want to make sure and ensure that it happens because the reality is, the countries that have access to more resources, their athletes do better.[82]

In recent conversations, I referred back to some of our earlier discussions in which she supported the need for increased access of African teams to the sport. But with more distance from the Games, Elodie anguished over her qualification journey, questioning whether she deserved even to call herself an "Olympian":

> There's the reality of the hope and dream to shoot for, so it's hard, 'cause you're like, "oh man, I could have been *this* good." But the reality is…this is what we were given. There is still that gap, you know. I don't know if it can be reconciled. I know there are teams that are better, and because they didn't make top sixteen they didn't qualify for the Olympics. And because there are all these rules for continental berths, other teams make it…So, you know putting myself in [those top competitors'] position, [they're] somewhat justified that they felt robbed of that position if, on paper, they are a better team. This adds to [my feeling of] not deserving to be [at the Olympics].[83]

The FIVB and IOC limit the number of teams a country can send to the Games. For instance, if three U.S. teams are ranked top sixteen in the world, the U.S. National Olympic Committee can only send two teams. Examples of limiting the number of representatives from a given country is a common practice across many Olympic events. Elodie struggled with these rules since she had long invested in the notion of meritocracy in sport. Globally, she saw the value of rules that

[82] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, December 27, 2013.
[83] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.

included competitors from many regions and countries. Without these rules, she said, "it would be a dominance of Brazilians, Americans, Germans, a couple Canadians now, and yeah essentially European countries or North American countries."[84] But as a beneficiary of the rule, she struggled to justify her participation.

Elodie often viewed her experience through the lens of a Canadian athlete, which deepened her feeling that she had not earned her Olympic title through merit alone:

> Since London, I've been in Canada and explaining or talking about that experience. [It] has been interesting; talking to Canadians about it. People are like, "You went to the Olympics?" and I'd have to explain like, "Yeah it wasn't for Canada, it was for Mauritius."[85]

This interview on March 29, 2016 was the first time Elodie had directly questioned the legitimacy of her Olympic title. During the interview, she had just finished the season as assistant coach of the University of Toronto women's volleyball team, which had won the Canadian championship title that year. In a separate conversation, she admitted that she had started processing the difficult parts of her Olympic journey. Caught off-guard by what appeared to me as sudden and unreasonable self-critique, and in a misguided effort to console Elodie, I insisted she should be proud of her participation.[86] She insisted otherwise. One and a half years later, I formally broached the subject again:[87]

> Elodie: I think the biggest stealer of joy is comparison, and if I were to compare representing Mauritius to representing Canada…there are feelings of shame a little bit because when I came back to Canada, people would introduce me as the Olympian. Most people would assume that I represented Canada. I always feel the need to be like, "No, it's a little country named Mauritius, you've probably not heard of it." And so, for some reason I felt like I had to bring that to light.

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[84] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.
[85] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.
[86] In the introduction, I elaborate on this conversation and my obvious missteps.
[87] In between these interviews, we had talked more about this theme of not deserving. However, they were not formally recorded.

> Yuka: That it was for Mauritius and not Canada? And why did you feel shame?
>
> Elodie: I guess shame that it wasn't a country that is well-known, or a bigger country. We've had discussions about it being rooted in whether I deserved to be there or not. So, it's rooted in the journey of getting there through the continental trials, you know?
>
> Yuka: If you qualified through Canada. Would you have felt shame?
>
> Elodie: I don't think it was necessarily the country. Maybe it was the process of getting there. It wasn't through the top twenty, it was through the continental trials.
>
> Yuka: Do you think Josh Binstock felt that way, because he qualified through the continental trials representing Canada, right?
>
> Elodie: [Laugh]. That's a good question. I don't know.[88]

Atypically, this exchange centered on the word "shame," though throughout our previous interviews, Elodie had expressed pride in representing Mauritius. While I latched on to the word "shame" in this exchange, I got the sense that Elodie was not ashamed to have represented Mauritius. Indeed, she took pride in putting "Mauritius on the map," displaying the Mauritian beach volleyball community on the international stage and proving to Mauritius that beach volleyball was within reach as a viable Olympic sport. Still, Elodie did feel embarrassed about the process of her qualification and the obscurity of the country she represented. In contrasting Mauritius to "bigger" or "well-known" countries in the Olympics, she underscored what BBC commentators had suggested in the opening ceremony: that some countries sent competitors while other "lesser-known" countries were happy to send anyone at all. Living in Canada, but representing Mauritius, Elodie had to explain her Olympic status to people who naturalized a hierarchy in ways that denigrated her participation. She, too, often viewed her experience this way.

[88] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, November 27, 2017.

While my interview questions initially aimed at how Elodie's Olympic experiences were entangled in broader relations of power and identity such as class, race, and gender, Elodie made clear during and since that March 29, 2016 discussion that she strongly identified, above all, as an athlete. From childhood, she had adopted an athletic identity and a faith in meritocracy in sport as a way to ease her immigration to Canada. In many ways, Elodie embodied the spirit of Olympism. Despite the odds against winning, she tried her best and represented Mauritius with integrity. This ardent sense of "the athlete in me," as she frequently proclaimed, offers another way to view her sense of disappointment in her Olympic experience. Like the Asian and Asian American classical musicians studied by Mari Yoshihara, who more readily identified with their "craft" than with their race or ethnicity,[89] Elodie did not feel as though she was representing a country or race when immersed in her "craft" (sport). She was, first and foremost, an athlete competing against another athlete. The following exchange epitomizes the struggle between Elodie's strong identification as an athlete and her desire to view competitions as purely meritocratic:

> Elodie: I guess it kind of goes to the nature versus nurture argument, right?…It's really hard to separate the external circumstances with just the competition on the court. But when you compete that's what it is right? As much as you don't want to think about those things, when it comes down to it you're there to win and compete and I think that's what I was talking about with the "athlete in me," like the competition itself is just. And maybe that's why there's a gap in reconciling those things. I recognize that there is that discrepancy yet, the athlete in me is still wrestling with, "man I just want to be that better athlete." I just want to compete at that level…I feel like that's the end goal of what the training is all about. You don't actually see the training that goes on for each team. What you *do* see is the results of the competition. That determines how well you've trained… the result that's left on the court.
>
> Yuka: But every athlete understands that in order to be that good, they have to train really well. A lot of training is about access to coaches, equipment, technology, and resources. …

[89] Mari Yoshihara, *Musicians from a Different Shore: Asians and Asian Americans in Classical Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 227.

> Elodie: How can I separate the training and resources and all that stuff versus the actual competition itself and leaving it on the court? Maybe that's one of the ways I'm coming to terms with [my disappointment about the Olympics], is to separate those things in my head [laughing] but it's just between you and that opponent, and that opponent is just better and has continually been better. And that's why I don't feel like we deserved being there, because they're better than us. Just look at the results.
>
> Yuka: What would be a more meritocratic way of having these Olympics knowing what you know about the importance of training, facilities, resources, in addition to natural talent?
>
> Elodie: Man, there's a lot of things to change and do [laugh]…I recognize the discrepancy in the availability of resources. So, hypothetically it could be picking people off the streets in their respective countries and have them in the same training facilities. But you know at the same time, how fun would it be to watch that?…I think part of the attraction [of the Olympics] is the idea that certain countries are better than others. Maybe it's pure talent, but most likely it's the investment that those countries put in their athletes and the belief in them. It's modern day war, no? [laugh].[90]

Intellectually, Elodie understood the significance and purpose of the diversity rules, and recognized that if sport were truly meritocratic there would be no need for the Continental Cup. Athletes whose countries provided more support and resources generally fared better in competition. Less privileged countries could not afford to invest in their athletes, nor in some cases did they want to allocate funds to highly specialized and elite athletic pursuits. The appeal of the Olympics, as Elodie argued, was about demonstrating which country was "better." But in this context of representing one's country, Elodie internalized and held herself personally responsible for her "sub-par" performance on the world stage. Her identification with "the athlete in me" made it difficult for Elodie to critique the structures of power that shaped her own experiences in the competition.

Performance of Diversity

Elodie's qualification as the African Continental Cup winner cemented her role in the performance of Olympic diversity. As a unique qualifier, the FIVB featured Elodie and Natacha

[90] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016.

in newsletters and promotional material to demonstrate the organization's commitment to and success with diversity. Such publicity illustrated the strategic investment in inclusion that Sara Ahmed has called "*the right kinds of appearances*,"[91] through which equality becomes another performance indicator and is treated as a display of an institution's diversity culture.[92] For instance, Elodie's picture appeared—although without her name—on the FIVB's publication "The Future of Beach Volleyball Today" in the section that celebrated the success of the Continental Cup in producing the most diverse competition season (Figures 4.4). The Continental Cup did in fact increase global participation in the sport; however, the publishing strategies demonstrate what Ahmed refers to as the repackaging of documents into more user-"friendly" forms.[93]

Figure 4.4 Elodie namelessly featured in FIVB's report "The Future of Beach Volleyball Today." (FIVB.org)

Elodie's presence in visual FIVB promotional material—both still and video—provided evidence of the organization's diversification efforts, but also welcomed Elodie in the "big

[91] Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 85.
[92] Ahmed, 85.
[93] Ahmed, 95.

leagues" as a tokened, raced, and classed guest to the sport. For instance, at the 2011 World Championship tournament in Rome, a crew from the FIVB interviewed Elodie about Mauritian beach volleyball. The organization published the video on their YouTube channel with the title, "Catching up with Elodie Li Yuk Lo." Although the title featured Elodie, the three-minute interview centered her around her role as a representative of Mauritius rather than as an outstanding athlete. One particular question seemed especially loaded. The interviewer, who sounded like a British man and did not appear on screen, asked Elodie: "Mauritius, obviously not particularly famous for sport, but famous for beaches. So how important is it, perhaps, to a country like Mauritius to have a pair like yourselves at a global event like this to put Mauritius on the map?" With this question, the interviewer positioned Elodie as an ambassador for Mauritius, rather than an individual competitor, and asked her what it meant to participate in a competition where Mauritius only registered as a tropical tourist destination. Caught off-guard, Elodie's response echoed the interviewer's question as she stated, "It's good publicity for Mauritius."[94]

Athletic Entrepreneurialism

This phenomenon of athletic entrepreneurialism illustrates Aihwa Ong's scholarship on flexible citizenship. The notion of flexible citizenship speaks to how the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions.[95] The evolving field of sport labor migration draws parallels between "highly skilled" migrant laborers to elite athletes: both are situated in intensified processes of globalization supported by developments in communication,

[94] FIVB Volleyball, "Elodie Li Yuk Lo," posted June 13, 2011, YouTube video, 3:04, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vmYPZWOB7E&t=50s.
[95] Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 6.

travel and growing interdependence of transitional markets. Professional sports clubs like Manchester United and the New York Knicks, as well as major athletic organizations like the National Basketball Association and *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* have marketed themselves as "world firms" in a flexible and globalized service community.[96] However, not all migrant athletes categorically identify as migrant laborers, and participate in international sport as amateurs, as did Elodie. Nonetheless, flexible citizenship serves as a useful framework to articulate diasporic athletes' malleable subjectivities and attitudes toward citizenship.[97] Ong asserts that "under transnationality the new links between flexibility and the logics of displacement, on the one hand, and capital accumulation, on the other, have given new valence to such strategies of maneuvering and positioning. Flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability."[98] In his case study of Martina Hingis, Michael Giardina also employs Ong's notion of flexible citizenship to demonstrate how athletic stars engage in forms of global mobility, more attuned to the global market than to traditional meanings of citizenship.[99]

Elodie—unlike Hingis—did not achieve global stardom, and was thus more limited in her ability to navigate global markets and borders. Elodie also differed from Hingis since in Canada, her Hakka ancestry had compounded disparities of class.[100] Although Elodie's global terrain was

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[96] Joseph Maguire and Mark Falcous, *Sport Migration: Borders, Boundaries and Crossings* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.
[97] Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 112. Ong uses this term to refer to the strategies of transnational Chinese business professionals, not athletes, however, this framework is useful in discussing Elodie's contexts.
[98] Ong, 19. In a similar fashion to Ong, I view transnationalism in reference to the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of "culture" through Elodie's experience. Ong, 4.
[99] Michael D. Giardina, "Global Hingis: Flexible Citizenship & Cosmopolitan Celebrity," in *Sporting Pedagogies: Performing Cultural & Identity in the Global Arena* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 62. Athletes as well as movie stars, media moguls, and international business players are among elite and globally mobile flexible citizens who exercise economic and cultural agency to operate outside of conventional forms of citizenship that afford them flexibility to succeed in a globalizing world.
[100] Giardina, 61.

less celebrated and more complex, her testimony extends Ong's notions of flexible citizenship. For Elodie, moving to France where Natacha lived was a core strategy that enabled the pair greater access to FIVB competitions, which took place in Europe. When I asked Elodie why she had not lived and trained in Mauritius, she explained:

> To be able train at a higher level we'd have to be out of Mauritius…It's very difficult to travel out of Mauritius. It's a lot more expensive. Most FIVB tournaments take place out of Europe so France was definitely a good home base for that.[101]

These tournaments were crucial for the pair to develop their skills, stake a presence on the world scene, and compete against other future Olympic competitors. In southern France, where they lived, they also had access to beach volleyball clubs and other competitors to practice with. Also, starting in 2011, Natacha's husband Thierry Long stood in as their coach.[102] Since no other women's team in Mauritius had competed internationally in beach volleyball, and Elodie and Natacha were an unproven pair before their victory at the All-Africa Games, they fought for recognition and funding from their federation but fronted the vast majority of their expenses. Still, Elodie's ability to relocate and train in France sharply contrasted with the opportunities available to other competitors from Mauritius (or from other parts of Africa) who lacked the capital to make such a move.[103]

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[101] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2013.

[102] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 29, 2016. Thierry Long has a tennis not beach volleyball background, so he generally helped run drills and execute practice plans that Elodie and Natacha developed on their own. While his volleyball knowledge was limited, Thierry competed at a high level with tennis. He was able to help the pair with mental preparation. He attended the Continental Cup in Rwanda and the Olympics. "Thierry Long: On devra être créatifs pour brouiller les cartes," *Le Mauricien*, May 31, 2012, https://www.lemauricien.com/article/thierry-long-devra-etre-creatifs-brouiller-les-cartes/.

[103] Many African athletes struggle to secure resources to train and compete outside of the country because they will not do well in competition, yet do not do well in competition because they lack the support that would have improved their skills. Given this catch-22, the Continental Cup is an important pathway to the Games that eliminates an extremely prohibitive barrier: the requirement to participate in FIVB tournaments. Nonetheless, without access to the FIVB and world tour, African teams will continue to struggle to improve their competitiveness and their participation in the Olympics will remain token.

Elodie is hardly the first diasporic athlete. Also, there are various migratory directionalities among transnational athletes, some of which reveal the disparities between the nations involved. In Elodie's case, she leveraged her Canadian ties and experiences to compensate for Mauritius' limited pool of talent and limited resources in exchange for the opportunity to represent her country of birth in international competitions. The opposite also occurred as wealthier nations actively recruited talent from less developed countries and offered citizenship in exchange for their athletic labor. For instance, athletes born in Kenya have recently moved to the US, Japan, and various European and Middle Eastern countries to represent those nations.[104] Furthermore, professional football leagues in Europe especially attract an assortment of migrant players, prompting Jonathan Magee John Sugden to develop a typology of football labor migration.[105]

Canadian and Mauritian passports both proved indispensable to Elodie in her journey to the Olympics. Elodie's Mauritian passport allowed her to travel throughout Africa with more ease and to claim her right to compete through CAVB, while her Canadian passport facilitated European travel and her training in France. As she recounted:

> Canadians are allowed to stay in Europe for three months without a visa…with tournaments it kind of work out that I would only be [in France] for three months go to a tournament…and come back and so [the visa] renewed itself.[106]

Elodie's status as a dual passport holder characterized her as a contemporary figure who represented the split between a state-imposed identity and an individual identity produced by

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[104] Wycliffe W. Simiyu Njororai, "Distance Running in Kenya: Athletics Labour Migration and Its Consequences," *Leisure / Loisir* 36, no. 2 (May 2012): 187-209, https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2012.729787.
[105] Jonathan Magee and John Sugden "'The World at Their Feet' Professional Football and International Labor Migration," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 26, no. 4 (November 2002): 430, https://doi.org/10.1177/0193732502238257. Typology of migrant athletes: settler, ambitionist, exile, nomadic cosmopolitan, expelled, mercenary.
[106] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, March 26, 2013.

political migration and shifts in global markets.[107] While her dual passports carried meanings for Elodie that exceeded the attestation of citizenship, they did not dismantle the nationalist logic of the Olympics.[108] In international sports competitions, the passport represented a basic requirement for participation and the contours of citizenship—the governing tool of residence, travel, and belonging.[109]

Elodie, like other multiple passport holders, inadvertently contributed to a celebratory narrative of globalization within the Olympics, even as she forged a unique identity and asserted her own sense of belonging in "multicultural" spaces. As a privileged transnational subject, she not only responded opportunistically to shifts in the global economic structures, she redefined the parameters of national subjecthood.[110] Elodie as a diasporic athlete, illustrated the possibilities and fluid nature of national identity in a competition based on fixed nationalisms. As she told me, light-heartedly:

> [I]n Mauritius…I'm an outsider, because I've been out of the country longer than I've been in the country…I don't feel like I'm really Canadian either, even though I grew up here. So it's funny, in Mauritius I'm Canadian, in Canada I'm Mauritian…And when I was in France I was Mauritian-Canadian, but they were like, 'but you're Chinese.' And I'm like, ok, 'so, I'm Chinese-Canadian-Mauritian.' [Laughing][111]

While multicultural rhetoric differs in Canada, Mauritius, France, and the Olympics, the language of diversity is transnationally mobile and transferable. It was thus a form of social capital from which Elodie drew to assert her belonging in international competition. In all of her competitions, Elodie accessed multicultural narratives through which she could enact a degree of

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[107] Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 2.
[108] Ong, 2. Ong also discusses a case study of a man from Hong Kong who takes advantage of his British passport for career opportunities. She talks about the moral meaning of citizenship in a particular nation and about subverting political regime. Ong, 119.
[109] Ong, 120.
[110] Ong, 4.
[111] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, April 10, 2013.

individual agency. For instance, she was able to exhibit a degree of comfort and ease in these multicultural spaces and articulate her presence in the official languages of the IOC—English and French—as well as in Mauritian Créole, which she accrued through her unique diasporic history. The multicultural narrative and Canadian positionality Elodie employed reflected the breadth of her repertoire as a privileged diasporic subject.

Transnational Network of Support

Although Elodie and Natacha had an "easier" berth into the Games and a situation of privilege relative to other African teams, they received little financial support from the Mauritian delegation and were forced to find independent means of funding. In addition to her ties with former University of Toronto players and athletic staff, Elodie relied heavily upon her family and the Chinese Mauritian community in Canada and Mauritius while training in France. In particular, two Toronto organizations with a large Chinese Mauritian base—Club M and New Life—offered moral encouragement and raised funds.[112] Club M sold baked goods at a fundraiser and organized a paid volleyball clinic run by Elodie, although Noel Siao—president and co-founder of Club M—refused to take any credit for Elodie's success. Elodie, by contrast, insisted that the club's support bolstered her sense of purpose and pride in representing Mauritius and her Chinese Mauritian community in Toronto. Since its founding in 1988, Club M had promoted the Hakka and Chinese Mauritian culture in Toronto.[113] Like other diasporic or identity-based organizations, Club M staked a claim in Canadian society through cultural and ethnic festivities, community outreach, and sharing aspects of Mauritian culture. In Canada and during her Olympic journey, this organization gave Elodie and her family a social network,

[112] Neither group is exclusively for Chinese Mauritians, however, the founders of each group are Chinese Mauritians and grew their member base through ethnic and national ties.
[113] "Background," Club M: Regroupement Mauricien de Toronto Incorpore, accessed January 12, 2018, http://www.clubmtoronto.com/our-history.

sustaining their unique Mauritian identity within Canada's dominant Chinese migrant population.

Figure 4.5 Baked goods sold at Club M fundraiser for Elodie Li Yuk Lo's Olympic journey. (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

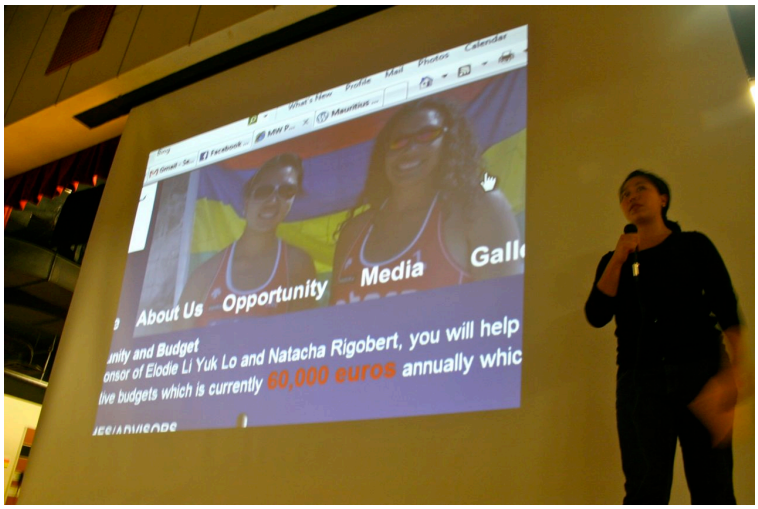

Figure 4.6 Elodie Li Yuk Lo presenting her journey to Club M members at the fundraiser. (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Elodie also received spiritual support that had a profound impact on her athletic identity. Like Club M, members of New Life funded Elodie, but their aid was inextricably tied to their spiritual conviction.[114] The organization could not give money to Elodie directly so individual members offered her "love gifts"—monetary donations. These "love gifts" helped cover basic

[114] Chapter 1 discusses the significance of New Life in Elodie and her family's settlement in Canada.

living expenses like food and rent. Mirella was particularly generous with her support for Elodie, which she tied to their shared faith:

> Yuka: What compelled you to give a "love gift"?
>
> Mirella: I think just believing in her dream and praying for her. When you pray for somebody, you care for somebody. And then you feel compelled to give. So, we wanted to support her.
>
> Yuka: What was your reaction when you found out she qualified?
>
> Mirella: Oh, I was excited. I was so excited because, hey, it happened. She believed, and God brought it to pass. We were so excited. We were praying for her, [through the] preliminary match and everything, until the end. We followed her. I may not have had contact with her, but through her mother and father we followed her journey. We were all together. We were happy.
>
> Yuka: Did you have a feeling about whether she would make it?
>
> Mirella: Yes, there was no doubt. I had no doubt. I knew she was going to make it, yes.
>
> Elodie: I can't say I had no doubts [laugh]. I mean, just physically, it was challenging, but I remember the last tournament, I never prayed so hard, and never felt so covered in prayer too. I was nervous for sure, but I was also so immersed in sense of peace.[115]

For Elodie, this sense of peace derived from the prayers of her spiritual community in Toronto that carried her to and through the Olympics. By the time of the Games, Elodie had been praying with her mother over the phone every day—an act that brought them closer together and sustained Elodie during her years in France. Elodie's ties to her spiritual community in Toronto enabled a nuanced athletic identity that transcended the need to foreground ethnicity or nationality in competition. Through the lens of her hybrid athletic-Christian identity, Elodie connected with other Christian athletes and sought support from Athletes in Action—a non-denominational Christian sports organization providing athletic and spiritual support across the

[115] Mirella Lam Hang, in conversation with Elodie Li Yuk Lo, Hélène Li Yuk Lo, and the author, July 7, 2017.

globe.[116] By doing so, Elodie identified as part of a unique subgroup within the transnational community of the Olympics.

Elodie also leveraged other ties to Chinese Mauritians—especially family members—beyond her Toronto network. For a tournament in Switzerland, one of Elodie's uncles took care of her and Natacha's food and accommodation. Elodie's uncle, Joseph Hip Sing, who served on the MOC, encouraged the committee to recognize Elodie and Natacha. Since the pair lived outside of Mauritius and had not yet won a major tournament, the MOC overlooked them and almost did not take them to the All-Africa Games.[117] Joseph also donated a substantial amount of money to an organization that supported Mauritian athletes including Elodie and Natacha.[118] In sum, by 2011-2012, Elodie was well connected to diasporic kin and community with the capital to help sustain her Olympic quest.[119]

But once Elodie and Natacha arrived in London, they continued to receive limited support from their athletic federation, which compounded their stress as first-time Olympians. Unlike larger delegations with team members to help coordinate training sessions, schedules and other logistics, Elodie and Natacha bore sole responsibility, distracting them from the focus required to compete. The prospect of failure hovered over their experience. For Elodie, the

[116] Athletes in Action runs sport development and missionary programs at the grassroots level. They also support Christian athletes at all competitive levels including collegiate, international, and Olympic.
[117] As discussed in the previous chapter, the pair's victory at the AAG put them on the radar of Mauritian media, which helped rally support. Elodie and Natacha's victory impressed the MOC, which proved their worthiness as contenders for the Olympic berth.
[118] Since Joseph worked for the MOC at the time, he could not directly give money to Elodie. Instead Joseph donated about two million Mauritian rupees equaling about $60,430 USD in 2012. The country's annual household income per capita was $3,408.78 USD in 2012. "Mauritius Household Income per Capita," CEIC: A Euromoney Institutional Investor Company (website), accessed February 26, 2018, https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/mauritius/annual-household-income-per-capita.
[119] Both of Elodie's uncles, along with rest of her family from her parent's generation, grew up in pre-independence Mauritius poor or working class. The post-independence years transformed the socioeconomic status of Chinese Mauritians as they now could own property, and enter professional and civic positions.

barriers in her path to the Olympics and the challenges that she faced once there contributed to a deep sense of disconnect with the country that she represented.

Elodie had spent a lifetime investing in her identity as an athlete and seeking membership in the exclusive Olympic community. But in the years after the Games, Elodie began to question the meaning of her experience. Had the Games truly enabled her to transcend the bounds of her ethnic and national identities? Or had she become an unwitting actor in the public celebration of a fictive global harmony? It became increasingly evident to her that the Olympics served as a platform to perform the spectacle of nation—a spectacle from which Olympic officials and delegates profited royally. Officials attended the Games and served as national representatives, gaining exclusive entrance to events and festivities—a "perk" for serving on a national Olympic committee. Just after the 2016 Rio Games, a Mauritian newspaper published grievances of several Mauritian athletes who accused MOC officials for riding the coattails of the athletes' hard work to get to the Olympics.[120] One critique in particular resonated with Elodie:

> If it was for [the athletes'] benefit wouldn't it be better to bring a sport med doctor or a physio or a massage therapist who could actually help the athletes? [The article claimed] that a lot of the reason why [officials] go is in their own interest and don't do anything for the athletes. And that the athletes have to take care of themselves. I could definitely relate [to that].[121]

Marketing the Olympics

Government leaders, the IOC, and the media capitalized on a rhetoric of equality, citing the London 2012 Games as the most progressive yet for women athletes. In his speech at the opening ceremony, Jacque Rogge boasted that the London Games were the first in which each participating country had women athletes. Yet the culture of women's beach volleyball

[120] "Jeux Olympiques 2016: Les sportifs Mauriciens dénoncent le traitement subi á Rio," *Le Mauricien*, September 28, 2016.
[121] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, in conversation with the author, September 29, 2016.

continued to lure spectators in "sexploitative" ways while reproducing normative gender scripts.[122] The host city, with the approval of the FIVB and IOC, had changed the uniform requirement for the beach volleyball event, allegedly to increase participation among diverse female athletes by allowing them to wear sleeved or sleeveless tops, and shorts no longer than three centimeters above the knee.[123] Yet the new rule continued to exclude most Muslim women. Nor did this rule change alter the convention of sporting a bikini during competition.[124]

From Elodie's vantage point, the athletes themselves were equal parts "consumed" and "consumers" of their Olympic experience—an arrangement that makes it difficult to assess where an athlete's agency and commodification begins and ends. In the athlete's village, Elodie had access to every imaginable amenity—food court, entertainment lounges, massage and physical therapists, doctors, optometrists, and beauty salons—all at no cost to her. There Elodie renewed her prescription, ordered glasses and did her nails in Mauritian colors.[125] Elodie had grown somewhat accustomed to the conveniences and perks at global events since much of her FIVB tournaments mimicked this trend, although on a smaller scale. She recalled that at the Klagenfurt Grand Slam tournament chefs cooked fresh food for athletes in a large, tented area reserved for players and VIP spectators. At the Grand Slam tournament in Rome, all of the players were invited to a Madonna concert, received Swatch watches (sponsor provided) and were hosted in sponsored hotels. While not all FIVB tournaments were this glamorous, Elodie

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[122] Requiring women to wear smaller and more revealing uniforms, these rules promote the objectification and what these authors called "sexploitation" of female athletes. Pam R. Sailors, Sarah Teetzel, and Charlene Weaving, "No Net Gain: A Critique of Media Representations of Women's Olympic Beach Volleyball," *Feminist Media Studies* 12, no. 3 (June 2012): 468, https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2012.698093.

[123] Fédération International de Volleyball, "Uniform Change for All Beach Volleyball Events," press release, March 18, 2012, http://www.fivb.org/viewPressRelease.asp?No=33699.

[124] Sailors, Teetel, and Weaving, "No Net Gain," 470.

[125] Elodie noted that it was a popular trend among female athletes to decorate their nails in patriotic fashion at these Games.

explained that it was typical for tournament organizers to put up athletes in hotels, give "swag," organize parties, and provide limitless quantities of high quality food and beverages at tournament sites. To some extent, the athletes were "treated" to amenities in exchange for the athletic labor that drew crowds and brought in the profits. High-profile players themselves capitalized on their own commodification by soliciting personal sponsors—an opportunity unavailable to low-profile players like Elodie. She nonetheless enjoyed the many perks of her position, which stood in stark contrast to those offered during tournaments in Africa.

Figure 4.7 Elodie Li Yuk Lo at the salon with her nails painted in Mauritian colors. (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Figure 4.8 Chef preparing food for athletes and VIPs at an FIVB Grand Slam tournament in Klagenfurt. (Courtesy Elodie Li Yuk Lo)

Meanwhile, the industry actively promoted the consumption of athletes, constructing them—literally—as larger-than-life heroes.[126] Prior to and during the 2012 Olympics, massive statues of two beach volleyball icons—America's Kerry Walsh-Jennings and Brazil's Emanuel Rego—towered over spectators at world tournament sites. The statues were also featured outside of London's beach volleyball venue where crowds swarmed for photos. The "consumption" of athletes was also based on interaction between live athletes and spectators—especially those who could afford to pay. Tournament organizers set up spaces where VIP spectators could "mingle" with players. At the London Olympics, the public could even purchase entry to parts of the athletes' village. The interactions between players and consumers were thus heavily mediated spaces that justified exorbitant admission and fees for those who could afford up-close interaction. This profit-driven model contradicted the ideal of "sport for all" since Elodie herself—an actor in this production—could hardly afford to compete, let alone attend as a spectator.

Global sporting productions—the Olympics above all—have long engaged in corporate relationships. But rather than the rampant privatization and deregulation that are characteristic of neoliberalism, the IOC dictates tremendous control over the Olympics' public and private relationships, demanding that host cities conform to commercial priorities and imposing strict brand protection.[127] In particular, the IOC enforces stringent rules regarding the use of the Olympic rings by host cities, media, and sponsors to protect brand's integrity.[128] Furthermore,

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[126] Carrington, "Cosmopolitan Olympism," 90.

[127] Jules Boykoff, "Celebration Capitalism and the 2014 Sochi Olympics," *Olympika* 22 (2013): 45.
In this discussion, Boykoff argues that the Olympics is quintessential of celebration capitalism—a cousin to Naomi Klein's theorization of disaster capitalism (in *Shock Doctrine*)—eschews rampant privatization through employing public-private partnerships where the state is appropriated for private profit (Boykoff, 46). Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, (New York, NY: Picador, 2008).

[128] International Olympic Committee, *IOC Marketing: Media Guide London 2012* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2011), 56.

international sporting federations proposing new Olympic sports must demonstrate "media friendliness" and high consumption rates that could in turn bolster exposure of corporate entities.[129] A 2012 London media guide clearly delineates the significance of these corporate relationships:

> The main objective of the Olympic Marketing Programme is to ensure the independent financial stability of the Olympic Movement. By creating long-term marketing programmes, the future of both the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games are ensured, with the revenue generated distributed equitably throughout the entire Olympic Movement. The Olympic Marketing Programme also ensures that the Olympic Games can be experienced by the maximum number of people throughout the world, principally via broadcast to television and digital media platforms, and that the equity that is inherent in the Olympic image and ideal is protected.[130]

In short, corporate sponsors produce and disseminate "the Olympic image and ideal." Capitalist interests are inseparable from the making of the Games.

Figure 4.9 Coca Cola sponsored event at London's iconic Hyde Park. Televised torch ceremony. Sponsor's tag line reads: "70 days celebrating future flames." (Photo credit author)

[129] For instance, in a proposal to include surfing for the 2020 Tokyo Games, the section on "popularity" outlined data from the 2014 International Surfing Association world surfing games and world tour pro surfing events, which included attendance, social media reach, digital media, media accreditation, and global television coverage by household. It also approximated audience and sponsor participation. International Olympic Committee, "Olympic Games Tokyo 2020: Tokyo 2020 OCOG Proposal on New Sports," in *Olympic Programme Commission Report* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, July 2016), 43, 95.
[130] International Olympic Committee, *Media Guide London 2012*, 6.

Figure 4.10 The FIVB's report "The Future of Beach Volleyball Today" touting the success of London 2012's beach volleyball event. (FIVB.org)

Dressing the Part

Corporate entities also capitalized on the construction of diverse subjects by branding athletes through clothing. What athletes wore at the Games had long signified a country's wealth and investment in its sports programs, as was apparent in media commentary. It was well known that Ralph Lauren had designed Team USA's non-competition outfits for the past few Games, and that The Hudson Bay Company had outfitted the Canadian Olympic team over the decades. Their garments, which attracted the media's attention for their design, utility, and technology, helped construct the image of the athletes themselves.[131] As Alex Shibutani, U.S. ice dancer, remarked, "getting a jacket is a really big deal. And so, for us going to Olympic team processing and seeing all the amazing apparel…" His ice dance partner interjected, "realizing that we're really part of something bigger than just our own sport, that we were part of team USA. That was

[131] Kali Borovic, "Who Designed the Team USA Opening Ceremony Uniforms? This Designer Is Familiar with Gold Medal Looks," *Bustle*, January 28, 2018, https://www.bustle.com/p/who-designed-the-team-usa-opening-ceremony-uniforms-this-designer-is-familiar-with-gold-medal-looks-8050910.

incredible."[132] For Elodie, what she wore at the 2012 Games served as another reminder of just where she stood in the Olympic hierarchy:

> Elodie: I do know one thing I was comparing ourselves to was the amount of gear or the lack thereof to wear at the Olympics. You know the bigger delegations, like Canada had sweet gear to wear at the Games. Like all the things that they got from The Bay. The Bay sponsored them with all the Olympic gear.
>
> Yuka: And that made you feel self-conscious?
>
> Elodie: A little bit. Yeah.
>
> Yuka: How come?
>
> Elodie: 'Cause ours wasn't as nice…I guess that it comes back to how I felt self-conscious. Maybe it circles back to the shame.
>
> Yuka: What did you feel self-conscious about?
>
> Elodie: The way we looked…I wanted some nice things too. To look good. To represent our country well. I don't know.
>
> Yuka: Where were those feelings coming from?
>
> Elodie: That's a good question. [Pause.] I don't know. I think I need more time to reflect on what I was thinking at that time.[133]

No Ralph Lauren or iconic department store designed Olympic gear for Mauritius. Beyond the outfit that Elodie wore at the Opening Ceremony, the Mauritian delegation provided Elodie and Natacha with a single, outdated windbreaker emblazoned on the back with "Team Mauritius," and a pair of matching pants.

[132] *Olympic Ice Dancers, Siblings and YouTubers. Meet the Shibutanis | Gold Medal Entourage*, posted January 4, 2017 by the Olympic Channel, YouTube video, 9:15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZEaxiDAtJY.
[133] Elodie Li Yuk Lo, conversation, November 27, 2017.

Figure 4.11 Elodie Li Yuk Lo in Team Mauritius windbreaker jacket.
(Photo credit author)

The inequality evident in athletes' clothing extended to their performance gear and equipment. Unlike most Olympic beach volleyball teams at the 2012 Games, Elodie and Natacha had to figure out for themselves how to get bikini uniforms that complied with FIVB and IOC standards.[134] Just prior to going to London, Elodie contacted the FIVB to rectify the situation. The FIVB, in turn, put Elodie in touch with the London branch of Nike. Nike not only provided their three bikini uniforms, the company gave them each two pairs of sunglasses, a backpack, a travel bag, a jacket, shoes, flip flips, and a tank top. In essence, this corporate entity outfitted Elodie with the kind of standard "swag" that she had longed for from her delegation. This

[134] Non-compliance with uniforms can disqualify athletes from competing. For this reason, Elodie did not want to leave it up to her delegation to take care of the uniform. She feared that the MOC's lack of familiarity with FIVB regulations could have led to irreversible oversights.

corporate philanthropy inevitably made the news.[135] Fashion in sport was not a trivial concern; it contributed to the construction of celebrity and to the consumerism that drove spectatorship. Carrington's case study of the failed African swimmer, "Eric," underscored the media's attention to "Eric's" typical, drawstring trunks in comparison to the formfitting, high-tech bathing suits of the "real" competitors, conflating his swimwear with the country's lack of sophistication. As Carrington put it, "Eric's" trunks had reduced him" from an Olympian "to a regular guy.[136] Unlike "Eric," Elodie and Natacha "looked the part," at least after Nike's intervention, but they could not shake the markers of their Otherness.

Elodie's experience prompts reflection not only on the politics of elite corporate sponsorship, but also on the politics of textile production and garment manufacture in the global south—including Mauritius—as well as the patterns of consumption in the global north that contribute to inequalities. For Elodie and Natacha, the inequalities in the global labor system that produced their gear remained hidden in plain sight. Their role as athlete-ambassadors for Mauritius was fraught with contradiction. Yet activists have used the irrefutable entanglement of the Olympics with corporate interests to draw attention to global inequalities. The opportunity to leverage the worldwide popularity of the Games was not lost on the Play Fair campaign—a watchdog coalition that mobilized the Olympic platform for protest. In 2010, it launched Play Fair 2012 to highlight the gap between the Olympics' universalist values and the realities of workers whose labor produces the Games across transnational labor markets. Their strategy

[135] "New Faces at Olympic Beach Volleyball: Mauritius Women and Men's Pair from Poland," *Huffington Post*, July 29, 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/07/29/new-faces-at-olympic-beac_n_1715997.html.
[136] Carrington, "Cosmopolitan Olympism," 90.

attempted to hold the London 2012 organizers to their promise to promote "ethical Games."[137] Protests such as PlayFair 2012 highlight the potential ways that even the corporatized Olympic Games might influence agendas of responsibility within the global economy.[138]

Conclusion

I cannot help but marvel at the complex social histories that converged in the making of Elodie's Olympic debut. Coubertin's universalist vision of Olympism rested on an ideal of peaceful competition among nations, yet in Elodie's experience, universalism remained imbued with colonial mentalities and nationalist rivalries. Britain, birthplace of modern sport and host to the 2012 Games, used the platform of the Olympics to broadcast to the world a self-congratulatory narrative of social and cultural progress while obscuring its own history of empire. Elodie's presence, like that of other diasporic athletes at these Games, thus promoted an idealized imagining of a twenty-first century multicultural world that glossed over the very histories that had produced postcolonial subjects like herself.

Nonetheless, when Elodie's feet first touched the artificially constructed beach volleyball court at the historic Horse Guards Parade, such thoughts were far from her mind. She had long struggled with her complex diasporic identity and idealized the Olympics as the pinnacle of athletic achievement—a site of belonging based purely on merit. Yet she and Natacha gained entry to the exclusive FIVB world circuit through the its implementation of a "universality" rule that left Elodie doubtful of her own legitimacy. While at some level she understood that socioeconomic and geopolitical inequalities necessitated "diversity" rules, the very existence of such rules challenged the equation of sport and "meritocracy" that was the foundation of her

[137] Jill Timms, "The Olympics As a Platform for Protest: A Case Study of the London 2012 'Ethical' Games and the Play Fair Campaign for Workers' Rights," *Leisure Studies* 31, no. 3 (April 2012): 361, https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2012.667821.
[138] Timms, 367.

athletic identity. Elodie's personal experiences in the FIVB world circuit leading up to the Games further unraveled the fiction of an international community of athletes. In this context, Elodie developed a hybrid consciousness under the tutelage of the FIVB and IOC, shaped by diasporic, national, and transnational histories.

While diversity rules defined Team Mauritius as representative of an underprivileged region, Elodie was in fact an elite and Western-trained athlete. Elodie's access to international competitions rested on both her claim to Mauritian citizenship and her privilege as a cosmopolitan and transnational athlete comfortable traversing many geographies and cultural spaces. Elodie admittedly capitalized on her unique diasporic ties to gain entry to the coveted Olympic Games, but the "universality" rule and Continental Cup also courted relatively privileged, cosmopolitan subjects who could afford to participate in high-level competition. No other African team competed against Team Mauritius for the one entry to FIVB tournaments reserved for an African team through the "universality" rule. Travel costs and time commitment were prohibitive.

Elodie's painful ambivalence about the London Olympics was intimately connected to her knowledge of geopolitical and ethnic disparities between and among Western and African nations. Her identification as an athlete and investment in the notion of meritocracy compounded her sense that since she had not ranked in the top twenty-four teams, she had not earned her Olympic title. Furthermore, if the role of diversity entrants served as a celebration of the industry's commitment to its ethos of humanism, multiculturalism, and international cooperation, the corporatized nature of international sport, particularly the Olympics, readily co-opted diversity for capitalist ends. Elodie found herself packaged for public consumption. Both consumer and consumed, she simultaneously engaged in and fell victim to a contradiction of her

own making as an Olympian who represented Mauritius through the African beach volleyball trials. She coped with these internal conflicts through her Christian faith and spiritual community. In her eyes, at the end of the day, the purpose of her Olympic quest was to glorify God. Elodie articulated her many positionalities on a very public stage, while baring her half-naked body to the world. Her testimony invites us all to contend with the contradictions inherent in our own complex lives.

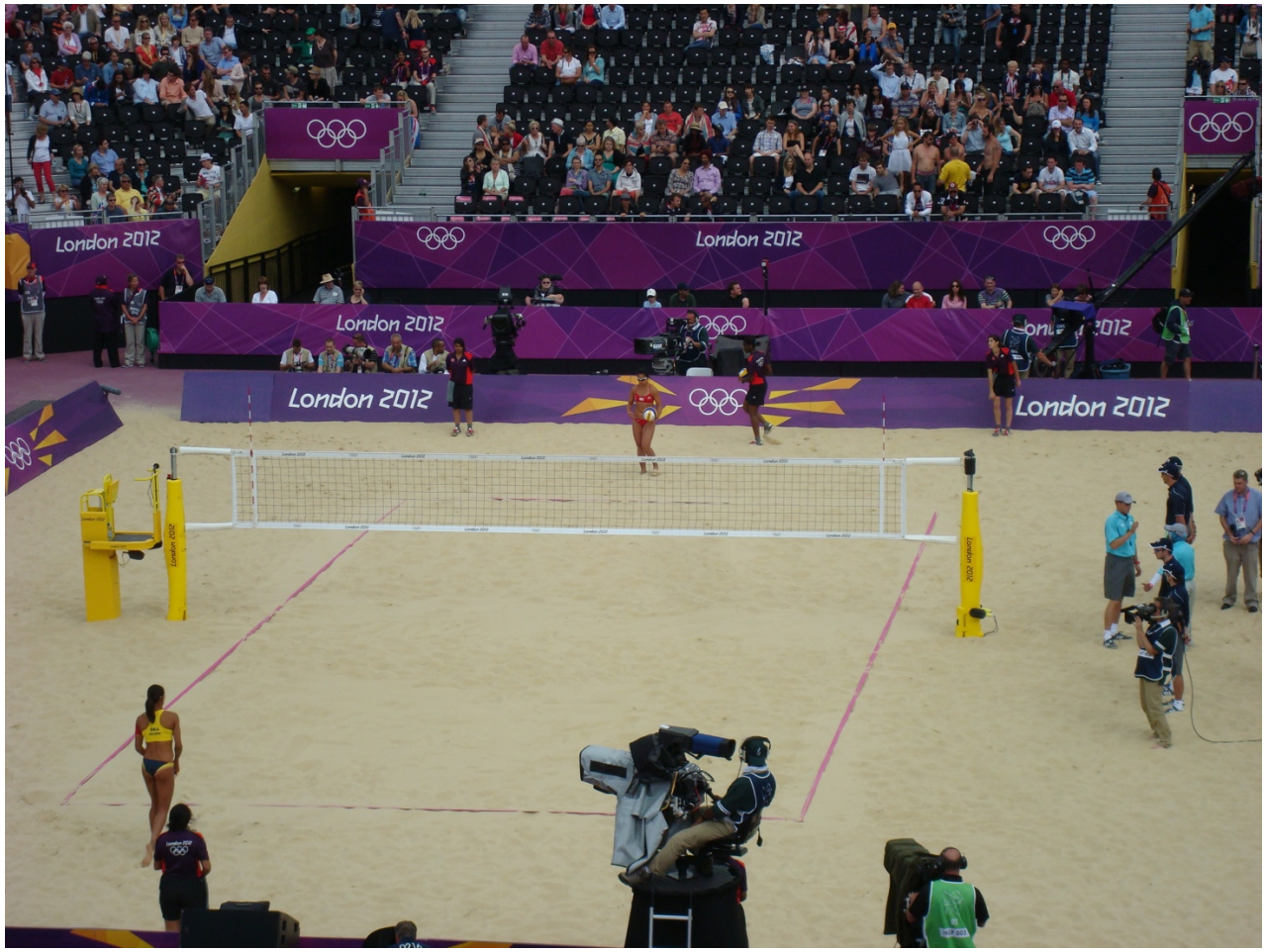

Figure 4.12 Elodie Li Yuk Lo warming up for her first Olympic match (in red).
(Photo credit author)

Conclusion

If we took seriously the cliché that sport teaches us important life lessons, what then might we make of the Olympics? The Games bring together highly transnational subjects whose global mobility flexes the bounds of citizenship and nation. The experiences of Olympians such as Elodie reveal the varied ways that transnational athletes form attachments to their sport, nation(s), and identities. As this dissertation has shown, those attachments, rooted in specific histories of diaspora, are also shaped by the contradictions within international sport. Those paradoxes generate struggles for diasporic athletes that are not easily resolved, but that stress the dynamic possibilities of twenty-first century identities. In Elodie's case, she continues to grapple with questions over whether she fulfilled her Olympic dreams and whether the Olympics achieved its unifying vision.

The IOC and FIVB harness nationalist ideologies and construct international athletes as models of meritocracy. They package athletes and put them on display for public consumption while representing sport as a pathway to individual achievement based on ideals of multiculturalism and meritocracy. Are these universalist ideals bankrupt? Or do they offer hope during a time of increasing right-wing populism across Canada, the U.S., and Europe? Given Elodie's complex journey to the Olympics, I am skeptical about the universalist claims and the nationalist sentiments of the Olympics.[1]

When Pierre de Coubertin established the International Olympic Committee in 1894 he envisioned international sport as a path to global peace and international cooperation. He called

[1] Ben Carrington asks of the Games: "What agency is left in spectacles like the Olympics to shift, disrupt and even dismantle the dubious scaffolding that ideologies of "race" and nationalism have erected around our self-identities?" Carrington, "Cosmopolitan Olympism," 82. Carrington suggests that amidst times of nationalist and racial politics, there is promise in these cosmopolitan solidarities such as the Olympic movement as a possible site for progressive forms of intervention. Carrington, 97.

this the Olympic movement. The efforts of Coubertin's successors to perpetuate the founder's vision are easy to spot in politicians' speeches, the athlete's oath, opening ceremonies, media coverage, and even protests. Inevitably, the Olympics were, and remain, enmeshed in the politics of their time. As I completed this dissertation, the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics took place for eighteen straight days from February 8 through February 25. News of North and South Koreans uniting to compete under a single national flag suffused the media.[2] Political pundits, sportscasters, politicians, and the public weighed in. Was this an indication of softening between the two nations? Was North Korea opening up to the world? Was the South Korean government engaging in sport diplomacy off the backs of South Korean athletes? Was North Korea hijacking the Games for its own political ends? Regardless of where one falls on the spectrum of Coubertin's vision for the Games, one thing is certain: the event summons conversations about the state of global affairs and offers a site for various cultural exchanges.

The 2018 Games also highlighted to a greater degree than ever before the transnationality of its participants: both coaches and competitors. Athletes who had "switched" countries, delegations with only "non-native" athletes, and athletes with dual citizenship frequently appeared in the 2018 Olympic Parade of Nations and drew media attention.[3] Bi-national coaches, too, shared the spotlight. For instance, the Korean hockey team hired Sarah Murray as its head coach—a decorated hockey player from the NCAA and a dual American and Canadian citizen with family ties to the National Hockey League. The North Korean figure skating pair also had a North American coach—Bruno Marcotte—from Canada. The couple trained in Montreal and

[2] Coverage of the united Korean delegation focused intensely on its mixed North and South Korean women's hockey team and North Korean figure skating pair Ryon Tae Ok and Kim Ju Sik.
[3] This CNN story focuses on U.S.-born athletes competing for other countries. It also comments on delegations with the most and least number of "non-native" athletes. Rob Hodgetts, "Does Switching Nations Make You Less of an Olympian?," *CNN*, February 14, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/08/sport/winter-olympics-athletes-switching-nations-pyeongchang/index.html.

like all international athletes, competed globally. None of this was unusual since coaches are not required to be citizens of the country they coach. While diasporic athletes like Elodie faced scrutiny for representing a country where they did not reside, there was more leniency toward coaches who sought out paid opportunity in other countries.[4] Meanwhile, the IOC celebrated the transnationality of athletes and coaches alike as positive indices of the benefits of globalization and the success of their own multicultural initiatives.

I focused on Elodie's experience as part of this sub-group of Olympians because her journey represents a critical feature of the global production of citizenship and national belonging in the twenty-first century. Olympic regulations necessitate belonging to one nation, while the philosophy that guides the competitions simultaneously embraces the ideal of cosmopolitanism. Tracing Elodie's struggles within this paradox highlights the multiple loyalties and identities embraced by diasporic individuals, opening new perspectives on citizenship in the twenty-first century. While Elodie exercised agency from a privileged position to compete at the Games, her strategies were in response to the international spread of beach volleyball and the increasing prestige and global reach of the Olympics. In other words, the structures of international sport encouraged the participation of transnationally mobile athletes like Elodie.

Yet even as authorities trumpeted the success of globalization, a wave of xenophobia swept through much of the industrialized world. While I was writing this dissertation, Americans elected Donald Trump on a 2016 campaign promise to restrict the flow of migrants to the United States. In the U.S., he succeeded in mobilizing a white nationalist base seeking to "make American great again." In that same year the Brexit referendum triumphed in the United Kingdom. A year later, during my archival trip to Europe, France was fully mobilized for an

[4] Diedra Dione, "Coaches Without Borders: Training Olympic Athletes Is a Global Business," *CBC Sports*, January 17, 2018, http://www.cbc.ca/sports/olympics/money-at-play/canadians-coaching-abroad-1.4488163.

election in which the anti-immigrant Marine Le Pen threatened to emerge the victor. Governments in many parts of the world promised to erect symbolic and physical borders to keep Others out. In response to the American and French elections, protests broke out across the world. In my Washington D.C. backyard, activists pushed back against a social and political assault on the rights of women, people of color, immigrants, and the LGBTQ community demanding not only the rights of citizenship, but also human rights.

Elodie negotiated her diasporic subjectivity on an exceptionally public stage organized around fictions of cohesive nation states and international cooperation in a political context of ethno-nationalism. Examining Elodie's rise to the 2012 Olympics in this political climate gave new valence to the word citizen. Elodie's very identity defied conceptions of a static and geographical "home" or "homeland." She successfully negotiated her complex positionality as a diasporic athlete, drawing upon her transnationality and diasporic communities to capitalize on a lifetime opportunity to compete at the Olympics. Elodie sought membership in a global community by insisting on the primacy of her athletic identity, ironically in a space where claiming *one* nationality is a requirement. As she painfully discovered, this community did not fully achieve its ideal of unity and cooperation. Sport did not transcend the politics of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, or citizenship. Quite the opposite. At the Olympics, more than ever before, Elodie contended with her twenty-first century diasporic identity.

During Elodie's journey to the Olympics, nation functioned as a less powerful site of identity than did ethnicity, culture, sport, and spirituality. The lessons from Elodie's experience are not, in fact, far removed from the realities of many diasporic subjects. Within a nation-centered framework, subjects are inherently bound to a physical geography. Nation states often link diasporic subjects to a distanced homeland—their origin—subjecting them to suspicion on

the basis of loyalty to their country of residence. Elodie's unique narrative demonstrates that an exclusive insistence on national identity may elide the multifaceted process of identity formation and the multiple homes and homelands claimed by many diasporic subjects. Within modern nationalisms, diasporic subjects find themselves divided and subdivided within a hierarchy of identities ranging from "model minority" to "illegals." I have focused on Elodie's story to convey this paradox of nationalism in international sport during an era of extraordinary movement of people, and to highlight the strategies that diasporic individuals deploy to survive and thrive.

This dissertation from the start has been a co-creation with Elodie, which I falsely assumed would lessen the grind of traditional academic writing. I had romanticized the process. In tracing Elodie's journey to the Olympics, I followed a more circuitous path than I had expected. While my ability to draw out Elodie's intimate thoughts and feelings over her identity as a diasporic Olympian in part stemmed from our unique relationship, the romance of putting together this story soon dissipated once the writing started. Just as Elodie's diasporic identity was perpetually in process, so too was her memory of her athletic career. With every single chapter, I agonized over style and framing, interpretation and content. Whose voice was leading the discussion? How should I balance the *showing* of Elodie's experiences with academic critique? Had I accurately contextualized Elodie's experiences in ways that reflected her vision, or had I turned her life into an academic abstraction? I wondered incessantly, *Am I doing this right?*

At the heart of this distress lay the question of ethics: institutional ethics, personal ethics, and scholarly ethics. Throughout the research and writing of this dissertation I thought about

Craig Howes's essay "Asking Permission to Write: Human Subject Research" with regard to my roles, responsibilities and obligation to Elodie, and as an academic embarking of this life writing project. Howes suggests we think less about asking for our subjects' permission in order to meet our professional ends, and more about our roles as resources and research colleagues for our subjects and their communities. In light of his work, I wondered if I successfully used my institutional means to put Elodie out in front as the owner of her experience.[5]

When I first started this project, I felt as though Elodie was "loaning" me her story—sharing parts of her experiences to help out a long-time friend. I thought I had done due diligence "asking permission" by going through the IRB process and discussing the nature and scope of the project with Elodie and her family. We were, in theory, on the same page regarding the protocol of the work. I felt so much gratitude toward them for offering their stories to me. Unfortunately, I had, to some extent, unconsciously approached Elodie's willingness to participate as my primary subject as permission to harvest her memories going to the Olympics for *my* academic purpose. It was that fateful interview on March 29, 2016 (discussed in the introduction) when I fundamentally understood that I had erroneously approached this project first and foremost to serve my academic agenda, rather than as a collaboration. I still could not believe that I had, even momentarily, treated Elodie in a way that gave her less authority over her own life and experiences. Since then, I had asked of myself in writing each chapter, *Does my framing of Elodie do justice to how she perceived her experience? Have I helped her in any way make sense of her complex Olympic journey that feels true to her? Have I listened to her stories deeply enough to tell it?* I hope the answer to these questions is *yes.*

[5] Howes, "Asking Permission to Write," 105.

Keeping in mind that this is an American Studies dissertation and not an authorized biography, I had to reflect deeply about how to apply scholarly analysis to Elodie's stories. I struggled most in areas such as religion where we did not have shared experiences. It is no coincidence that my prospectus failed to mention Elodie's Christian faith. At the defense, professors Kath Sands and Craig Howes insisted on the centrality of Elodie's spiritual identity in the creation of this dissertation. At the time, I felt the project was complex enough and I wanted to stay in my academic and personal wheelhouse. If any aspect of this project would threaten our relationship, I thought it would be academic scrutiny of her religious identity. For the most part, Elodie and I have respectfully acknowledged our differing spirituality. In the wake of the prospectus defense I remembered a painful conversation with Elodie soon after her maternal grandmother passed away. With tear-filled eyes, Elodie expressed sadness over our limited time together on earth. To her, since I did not accept Jesus Christ as my savior, He would not permit me to heaven. There was no contempt or judgment in Elodie's voice. Just grief. Initially, when I decided to avoid all discussion of Elodie's faith in this dissertation, I thought I was showing respect by refusing to subject her spirituality to my academic analysis. Over the course of this research, however, I recognized just how fundamental Christianity is to Elodie's identity, and how it evolved in her own journey to the Olympics. I began to ask Elodie questions about her spirituality that I had previously avoided. When her stories started pouring out, it was if she had been waiting for me to finally take a deeper interest in this part of her identity. I realized that my attempt to "protect" our friendship had reflected my own discomfort with Christianity, which was tied to my left-leaning liberal politics. I am grateful to this project for allowing me to know Elodie with more depth and compassion.

In Elodie's testimony, it was her faith that carried her through the anguish and the glory of her Olympic journey. Today, to the extent that she affirms her own athletic achievements, she attributes them God. Yet her ambivalence about *how* she qualified for the Olympics as well as the inequalities she both suffered and benefitted from *in order to* qualify reveal her continued deep investment in the ideal of meritocracy. Elodie has struggled over the years to reconcile the apparent contradiction between spirituality and meritocracy, fervently holding onto both her deeply-held faith that her Olympic participation was God's work and her cherished ideal of sport as a pure measure of athletic merit. In so doing, she is not alone. Talented athletes have long sustained the intense labor inseparable from astonishing talent with their deep sense of devotion. After all, modern sport and the Olympics emerged from evolving Christian traditions of the late-Victorian era. Furthermore, the iconic film *Chariots of Fire* epitomizes the tension and inseparability between God and sport. For Elodie, as with many elite athletes, passion for sport and athletic achievement operated in the same register as passion for religion among evangelical Christians. Throughout her Olympic journey, as well as during this project, Elodie's faith evolved as she sought to embrace both her athletic and spiritual identities.

For Elodie, the embodied act of playing sports felt like a transcendent experience. In the joy of competition, inequalities of race, gender, power and struggles over identity retreated into the background. The game alone seemed to matter. Yet as this dissertation has demonstrated, and as Elodie herself is aware, sport itself is never entirely independent of politics. Even the most exceptional talent is constituted within specific fields of local, national, and international power. In that sense, Elodie was never a free agent. She chased the highs of competition. When in "the zone," the world outside faded from consciousness, and she noticed nothing but the game itself. As she described it, she felt the work of God run through her. For Elodie as for many other

athletes, these kinds of impassioned athletic experiences offered a powerful—if momentary—sense of freedom and a sense of suspension from ordinary life. In the flow of the game, athletic passion took on a spiritual meaning.

It is perhaps a measure of the intimate relationship between athletic and spiritual passions that in 2014, Elodie switched careers from professional athletics to missionary work with Athletes in Action (AiA)—a Christian organization using sport to spread their gospel. Her calling to missionary life came after an emotional breakdown she suffered under the pressure of preparing for the Continental Cup finals in Rwanda. She found peace and comfort only after surrendering to God, in the conviction that her actions—regardless of the outcome of the finals—was to glorify Him. At the Olympics, AiA members offered Elodie spiritual support to help her through the enormity of the experience, which also gave her a more concrete model of how she could merge her love of sport and love of God. As she retired her identity as an athlete, she prayed about how she would best serve God in her new role. As she recounted, the turning point came in her spiritual connection to one of the Nigerian players to whom Elodie almost lost a match at the All Africa Games. Through this friendship, Elodie twice visited Nigeria where she helped to found and run volleyball camps for the community, and establish chapels as requested by the group. She plans to return to Nigeria in May for two months. At present, in addition to global outreach, one of Elodie's central roles at AiA is to provide spiritual support for Christian student athletes on university campuses in southern Ontario. She helps students organize peer-to-peer support groups and provides individual guidance to help students navigate the pressures of student-athlete life with spiritual devotion.

While Elodie feels as though she is fulfilling her calling, the life of a sport missionary in Canada has yet again incited difficult scenarios in relation to Elodie's unique identity. Athletes in

Action, like the competitive sport community in which Elodie grew up, is a racially homogeneous and a largely patriarchal space. Elodie's experiences as an international athlete and a Chinese immigrant from Mauritius growing up in Canada have continually inspired her to reflect on her positions in the spaces she occupies. She is critically aware of the historical and contemporary roles of Christian missionaries. Over the years, Elodie has shared her concerns with me and her colleagues about missionary work (domestic and abroad) and the organization's limited engagement with issues of diversity and colonialism. Despite the efforts of some of her colleagues, in this context, too, Elodie has felt that her peers have misunderstood her unique diasporic identity.

Undoubtedly, Elodie's involvement in the AiA during the course of writing this dissertation has informed her reflections of the past. At the time, as she recently shared, she was not mature enough to "say something" about her treatment in university, or to analyze the complexities of her position as a diversity entrant in the FIVB and Olympics. Reflecting on those experiences, Elodie has felt compelled to take action in her current situation. However, even after vocalizing her concerns, Elodie observes that the organization continues to allow staff to make culturally inappropriate comments—comments that stem, she believes, from a lack of institutional reflection over race, gender, and class privileges among its employees and within the organization.

This dissertation has provided an intimate, diasporic, multiethnic perspective on international sport—a perspective that highlights the issues inherent in the nation-based structure of the Olympics that conflates ethnicity, nation, and culture. Even among prominent "multicultural" states such as the U.S., Britain, and Canada, the identities of non-white athletes in those delegations are hyphenated: the Asian-American, the Somali-born Briton, the Jamaican-

Canadian. The celebration of diversity and intercultural exchange at the Olympics clings to a multicultural rhetoric that is nonetheless informed by essentialist notions of cultural fixity and ethno-nationalism. At the Olympics, "culture," as embodied as transnational athletes, is abstracted, commodified, and consumed, even as the competition continues to require loyalty to a single nation-state.

Will there ever be a point at which nation is no longer the central way to categorize an athlete-representative? If global processes of migration continue to accelerate, what purpose will citizenship serve? How will the Olympics adapt? Elodie's journey to the Olympics also raises, if indirectly, broader questions about the cost of both unitary national and singular ethnic identities in an increasingly transnational world. Vijay Prashad offers a framework—polyculturalism—that "uncouples the notions of origins and authenticity from that of culture."[6] Rather than proposing a new humanism stripped of ethnicity, polyculturalism suggests that ideals of cultural community need not be constrained within the narrow boundaries of ethno-nationalism.[7] Does Elodie's story mark the beginning of a trend toward polycultural ideals? Will Elodie's struggles with identity and belonging that I illustrated within these pages seem dated in generations to come? Elodie resisted the conventional boundaries of the Games of her time not as a political act, but as an individual reaching toward her own truth. In one way or another, are we all not *playing the game*?

To close this dissertation, I offer a partial edited transcript of my exit interview with Elodie. More so than in the chapters, I want readers to hear the inflections of our exchanges, but most importantly, Elodie's reflections on being my dissertation subject for the past three years.

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[6] Prashad, *Myth of Cultural Purity,* 65. Prashad discusses the polycultural framework in relation to Robin D. G. Kelley, "People in Me," *Colorlines Magazine,* Winter 1999, 5-7.
[7] Prashad, 65.

As part of my ethical commitment to research and friendship, I hope I have given back to Elodie more than I have taken from her throughout this process.

*****

Exit Interview on February 23, 2018

Yuka: Why did you say "yes" when I asked if I could write my dissertation about your Olympic journey?

Elodie: Because of our friendship. You've helped me a lot along *my* Olympic journey and I was just super excited that you were doing your PhD and you had told me about your desire to write and your desire to write a biography. If there was anything I could do to help, then yeah.

Yuka: Did you have any fears or concerns?

Elodie: In the beginning. I think I came to you with a bad dream once that we weren't friends, and I was like, "Is this going to be the case?" I think I was just scared about that. And then we talked about what the project entailed and talked about the boundaries [to protect] our friendship.

Yuka: What was it like being my research subject?

Elodie: Honestly, I just felt like I was sharing my story with a friend. A lot of the questions were reflective of the journey that I was already on and in many ways the process was a good way to heal, and process things I kind of put aside. I trusted you with the analysis afterward. You'd keep me in the loop with what it was going to sound like.

Yuka: You said you were already on this journey processing the Olympics. Can you tell me more about that?

Elodie: It was a time that I put behind me and that I wanted to move on from. But I needed to go back and reflect on the time and heal from it. You know, the good and the bad. It wasn't all bad but, how was I really feeling? Even now, getting in touch with my emotions and letting my heart catch up with my mind. I wasn't letting my heart catch up. So, going back and having to resurface how I felt during that time, that was part of my own personal process to heal. In many ways you kind of pushed that process, 'cause I wouldn't do it on my own.

Yuka: Were there times and moments when you felt uncomfortable with my pushing of that process?

Elodie: Yeah. [Pause.] Maybe a couple times breaking down in interviews and crying. Kind of like now [laugh and sob]. I don't know why I'm crying. These emotions keep coming up [laugh]. I just remember the time in your building actually. I don't know what we were talking about specifically, but I think it was the realization about how I felt in terms of qualifying through the

universality rule. And I think we were going back and forth trying to understand it's not all about effort or earning the spot, there's so much more to it. I don't know if you remember that time.

Yuka: Oh my gosh. I so remember. I felt so bad. I felt so bad afterward. Ugh, I'm crying now too. [Pause.] I was listening to the tape and I was being this terrible friend. I just could not see in the moment that you were struggling so much with something. For me, I just remember the very first interview I had with you for a class project. I was just so stoked because you were saying what every academic wants to hear, like sport is not a meritocracy and there's politics involved, and that money buys success, and I was like "yeah, yeah, yeah, I can work with that!" And then we had this conversation, and I was like "HER TUNE HAS CHANGED." [Laugh.] I was floored. I was struggling too because the academic side of me was about using the "data" from you to suit *my* conclusion…I was not listening to you. I was a bad friend too. I don't know if I should have turned off the tape recorder, or what. I was just trying to friendsplain to you, like "No Elodie, you totally deserved it and they were wrong, and…" I was just so misguided. I felt awful. That was a huge wake up call for me. I'm so sorry.

Elodie: I think it wasn't so much what you were saying or how you were saying it. It was just that, intellectually I understood all those things, right? But I just didn't believe it at the time. And the whole heart catching up with my head. That was the time it was slowly sinking in. And that's why I was so emotional about it. And the athlete in me too, that's what I grew up believing. 'Cause as an athlete I learned to work hard to earn my spot. That was just engrained for years. Those realities came crashing and [I was] trying to come to terms with it.

Yuka: Well, I'm glad you pushed back in that conversation because it totally changed my approach. I didn't take seriously enough how important your athletic identity was. I was so focused on other things like my arguments about race, class, gender, immigration, etcetera.

Elodie: How do *you* feel about that incident?

Yuka: Ugh, I'm crying again. [Pause.] It was a really upsetting experience for me because my best friend is here visiting me and I'm almost fighting with her, and I'm recording it. It made me question what the hell am I doing with this dissertation. On an academic level I was like, "I'm a fraud!" It took a long time to start writing again. And I felt like such a terrible friend and wondered how many other times I've totally dismissed how you're feeling and where you're at? And then to have it all be recorded. It was so painful.

Elodie: Beyond the doors when we left, I just left what happened in that room. I was like, "okay, that's just part of the interview process." And that's how I kind of approached the interviews. That's kind of how I processed it. But it did prompt my own personal reflection after, and even still, like why do I wrestle with this part of my identity? Why can't I really call myself an Olympian? That was the whole conversation, right?

Yuka: I really admire that you are able to honor the spaces that you're in, in those moments. In hindsight, I see what happened, but in the moment, I just felt like ugh, that was a frustrating interview. It didn't work. It wasn't until I listened to the interview I was like, *oh*. You said you

went in thinking that was just the interview process, that's the agreement we came upon. And for me, I felt like I broke that agreement.
…
Yuka: Did you have any expectations coming into this project?

Elodie: No. I think my idea was that "hey, I'll have some interviews with you, talk about my experiences and trust you with the analysis. I think it helps that I know you and we've had a discussion of what it could potentially bring up. I think you were pretty good at laying that out. And you even mentioned that our friendship might be stretched a little bit because of the interviews and the research.

Yuka: Were there aspects of being my "subject" that surprised you?

Elodie: Depending on the day that you interview me, you might get one thing or the other, depending on where I was at in my life. It's crazy that you have to work with that. And yet it's interesting. I think that was the most surprising thing, like how it's not static truth. That's something I had to come to understand. Like, I felt this *that* day, and sometimes, you'd ask me again, and today I feel like *this*... [Another] cool thing that I noticed was the way my family got involved in understanding more of our family history. So, that was prompted by, not only the interviews but asking us to get books on the Hakka community in Mauritius. It was neat to see my parents ask around, read the books. My dad would be like, I know this person and that person, and he'd be like, "Did you know that this is why the Hakka people are like this…" I think it was really neat to see them get involved and ask around their family to understand a bit more about themselves.

Yuka: Yeah, that was a really nice part of the project.
…
Yuka: One big concern I had about doing this project was viewing our "friend time" as "data." How would you say we did on that front?

Elodie: I think when we started I had a lot more time. You made clear [when a conversation] would be for work, and other times it would be for a catch up. I think where I struggled was the amount of time I could give. So, if there was a period of time for interviews or data collecting, there wouldn't be a whole lot of time for catching up, or it would be really brief.

Yuka: So, you felt like the little time we had was taken up with the project instead of catching up as friends?

Elodie: Yeah, I think so.

Yuka: How does that make you feel about the project then?

Elodie: I think there were times where it was hard to fit it into my schedule and I just felt like it was another thing on my list, especially during my busy seasons and busy weeks. And I felt bad, 'cause I wanted to give more and do more, but it was just really hard with everything going on.
…

Yuka: Having read multiple drafts of the chapters and having attended conferences where I presented parts of the dissertation, how do you feel about the conclusions I've drawn about your experiences?

Elodie: I think I come from a place of trusting your academic brain. I didn't have ideas for how it would go one way or the other.

Yuka: But were there details or conclusions I came to that you don't agree with?

Elodie: Nothing that's glaring right now. I think for ones that I didn't understand, I'd ask you for more clarification. But I don't remember which one.

Yuka: I have a big question for you [laugh]. What do you feel was the point of going for the Olympics?

Elodie: My faith comes into this quite a bit because I do believe that it was in God's plan. All of it: the good, the bad, the ugly. It was a prayer of mine even before the qualification. To surrender to Him the results, whether I win or lose to have Him show me how I can use this journey and everything I've been through up until that point, to glorify Him and bring Him to the forefront. I just trusted that was His plan and to come into the promise that I made Him, which is why I joined [AiA]…The title of Olympian on paper, even though I'm working through calling myself that, I see how doors open in ministry. I was in Nigeria and we were talking about how to gain trust with athletes, and I just wanted to bring to Nigeria some of my own experiences. I sent a couple students questions [about] why they would trust me? [O]ne of the students wrote back "It helps that you're an Olympian too." So, instances like that open up opportunities and doors to connect with people.

Yuka: If one of the main goals of going to the Olympics was to glorify God, do you feel you achieved that?

Elodie: [Pause.] Yes. [Pause.] There are different little steps along the way that I hope have done that—bring him glory. I mean, it's a challenge because I still wrestle with what it means to do that, and what it looks like to do that. It's nothing I can do but to surrender to Him. It's a process and a journey of letting go and trusting Him and His plan. I guess I won't really know until I see Him face-to-face one day.

Yuka: Having the experience that you did going to the Olympics, would you do it all again?

Elodie: Yeah. No dream comes easily, and all the experiences are part of it. It is about the journey. It is about the process. I'd do it all over again. There are so many things I learned from it and grew as a result. Had you asked me at my lowest point, I would have said, "I just want to give up" but when I look back, it was all part of it.

Appendices

Appendix A. *"*Anou Batir Nation Mauricien*"*

Donne to la main, prend mo la main
La main dans la main monwar
Anou batir
Anou batir
Nation Mauricien
(CHORUS)
Ki to Hindou
Ki to musulman
Ki to sinois
Ki to enn cretien
Ki to créole
Ki to enn blanc
Tous c ki finn né dans sa pay la
Pé bisin marsé la main dans la main
CHORUS
Aussi lontan
Ki nou pou pense come fanatik
En communauté
Pas pou ena la paix
Pou ena la misére
Nou pas pou capave
Sove nou l'honnere (bis)
CHORUS
Met dé coté communauté (bis)
Ouvert to lizié et guette 4 coté
Lizié tous pay apé guette nou pay (bis)
L'honnere l'ile Maurice
Li dans nou la main (bis)
CHORUS

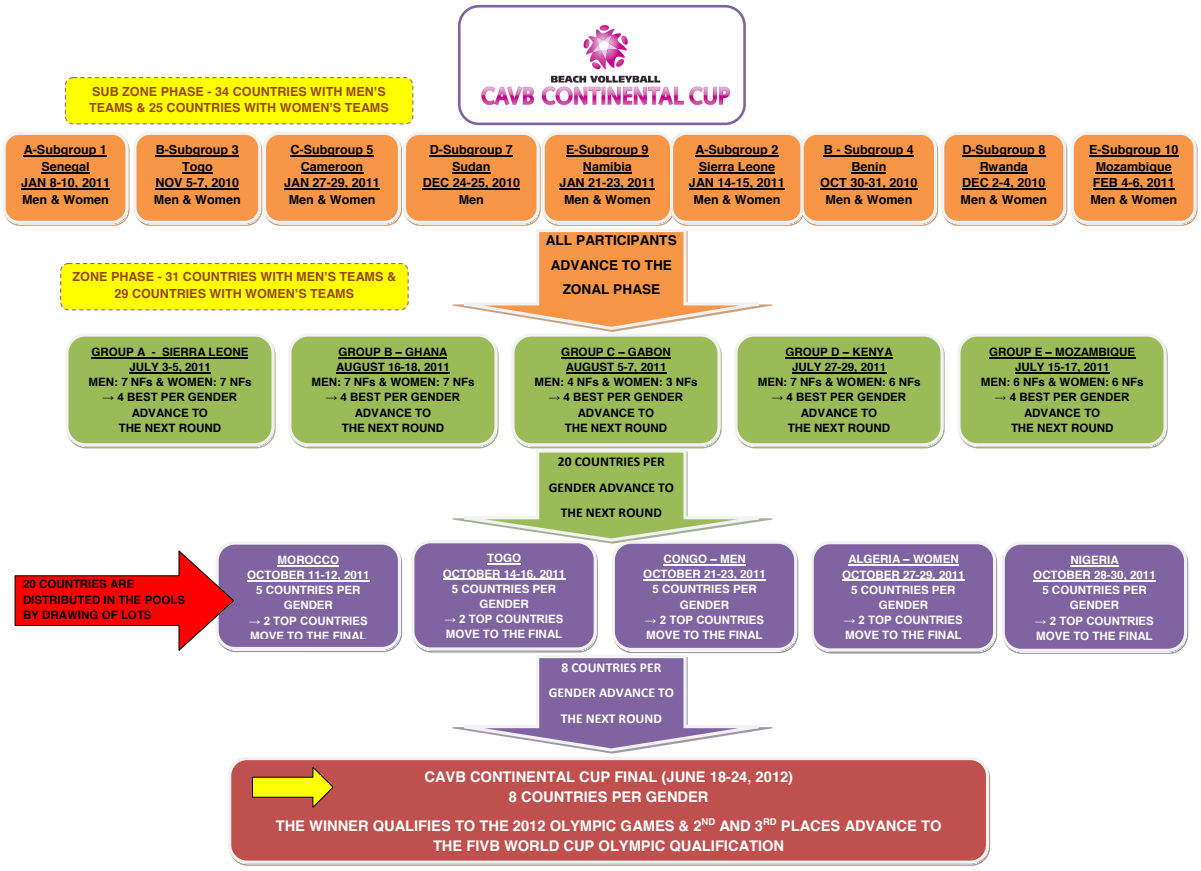
Give me your hand, take my hand
Hand in hand my friend
Let's build
Let's build
Mauritian nation
(CHORUS)
Whether you are Hindu
Whether you Muslim
Whether you Chinese
Whether you Christian
Whether you Créole (black)
Whether you white
All who were born in this country
Need to walk hand in hand
CHORUS
As long as
We are going to think like a fanatic
In community
Not going to have peace
Going to have misery/poverty
We won't be able to
Save our honor
CHORUS
Put aside communalism
Open your eyes and look at the 4 sides
The eyes of all countries are looking at our country
The honor of Mauritius island
It's in our hand
CHORUS

Appendix B. "Canada, Land of Dreams and Hopes" 20th Anniversary Presentation of New Life (Courtesy Mirella Lam Hang)

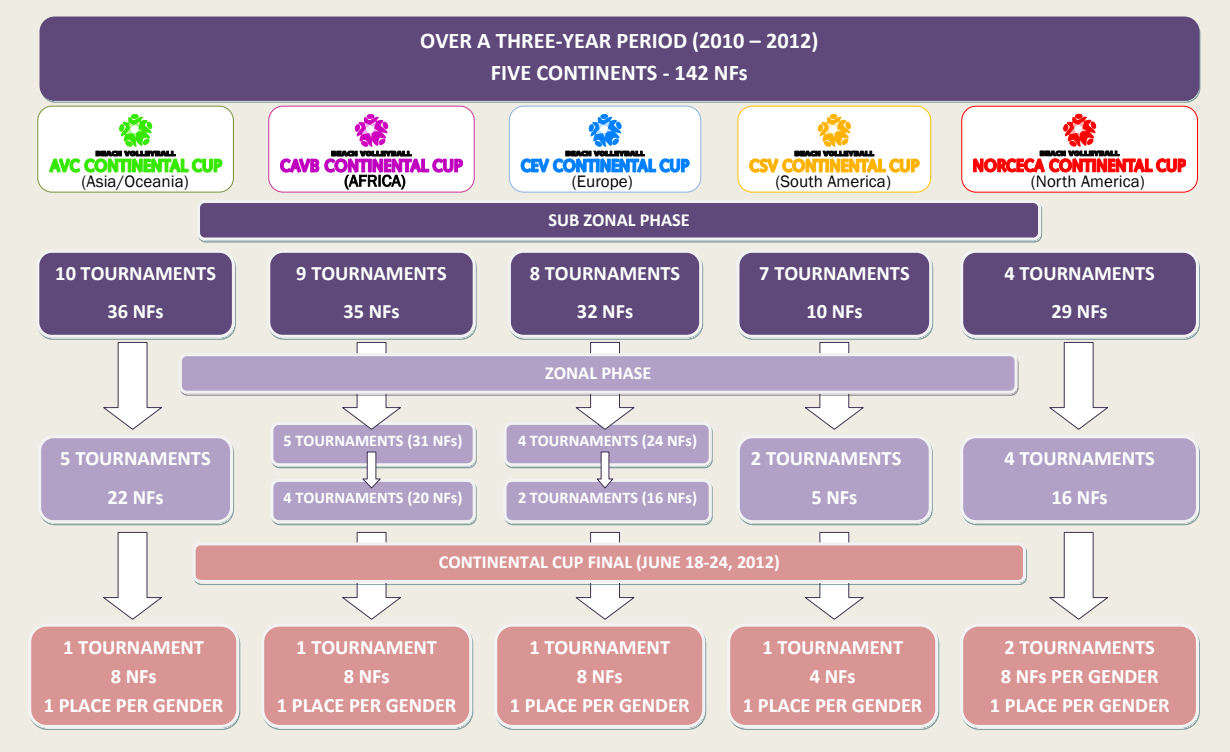
Note: Each line represents a slide of the presentation. Each slide was accompanied by one or more photos. This except represents the first twenty slides that encompasses a narrative arc relevant to the analysis in this chapter.

Canada, land of dreams and hopes
With its beautiful landscape and vast land.
It is a land flowing with milk and honey.
Abounding in food; all kind of meat, vegetables and fruits.
Since 1986 – Large influx of Mauritians,
Mostly young professionals in their mid to late 20's.
They had high hopes & expectations: job, car, house, greater achievements…
But they were soon disillusioned by the harsh realities of everyday life.
Loneliness, hostilities, expensive small apartments,
And the bitter cold were their lot.
Among them were three Mauritian girls (Marilyn Chung, Mirella Lam & Jane Leung) with a dream of their own.
They believed in a big and mighty God who can move mountains.
In 1988 they decided to start by faith a ministry reaching out to Mauritians.
They had neither contact, nor experience nor meeting place but had prayer as their weapon.
They met weekly at Toronto City Hall, rain or shine, for prayer.
Their first contacts were Guy & Margaret.
Friendship grew through outings
Then to church programs.
The lord used this church to bring many Mauritians together.

Appendix C. CAVB Beach Volleyball Continental Cup Format (modified from fivb.org)



Appendix D. Beach Volleyball Continental Cup Format (modified from fivb.org)



Appendix E. CAVB Beach Volleyball Continental Cup Zones and Pools (modified from fivb.org)

Pool A Subgroup 1 **Senegal**		Pool B Subgroup 3 **Togo**		Pool C Subgroup 5 **Cameroon**		Pool D Subgroup 7 **Sudan**	Pool E Subgroup 9 **Namibia**	
1	**Senegal**	**1**	**Ghana**	**1**	**Cameroon**		**1**	**South Africa**
2	**Guinea Bissau**	**2**	**Togo**	**2**	**Gabon**	**N/A**	**2**	**Namibia**
		3	**Côte d'Ivoire**				**3**	**Mauritius**

Pool A Subgroup 2 **Sierra Leone**		Pool B Subgroup 4 **Benin**		Pool C Subgroup 6 Congo RDC	Pool D Subgroup 8 **Rwanda**		Pool E Subgroup 10 **Mozambique**	
1	**Morocco**	**1**	**Algeria**		**1**	**Kenya**	**1**	**Mozambique**
2	**Sierra Leone**	**2**	**Nigeria**		**2**	**Rwanda**	**2**	**Swaziland**
3	**Guinea**	**3**	**Niger**	**N/A**	**3**	**Uganda**	**3**	**Zimbabwe**
4	**Liberia**	**4**	**Benin**		**4**	**Burundi**		

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